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THE CAMERONIANS.

A Novel.

BY

JAMES GRANT,

AUTHOR OF

'THE ROMANCE OF WAR,' 'OLD AND NEW EDINBURGH,' ETC

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE CAMERONIANS.

CHAPTER I.

NEWS AT LAST!

FROM such terrible episodes and scenes as those that close our last chapter, and from such a land of wild barbarity, we gladly turn homewards for a time.

It was summer; and the season had scattered its roses and their leaves lavishly over the old Scoto-French garden of Eaglescraig, for such it was, with its closely-clipped privet hedges, its long grass walks, balustraded terraces, mossy sundials,

and parterres, where deep box-edging was alternated by flower borders running along the paths, and where wall-flowers, sweet-williams, and tiger lilies, with moss and Provence roses, were varied by espaliers that in the coming time would be laden with fruit.

The summer was in its glory, but there was not much brightness within the house of Eaglescraig. So Cecil, who had latterly met with such scanty kindness from Sir Piers, was actually his grandson, and the honours of the old line were perhaps neither to die out, or pass to a far-away branch, after all!

John Balderstone had proved all this, and great were the content and glee thereat among the old visitors of the mansion; there being no regrets for Hew being 'scratched,' as he called it, 'and out of the running now,' for his general bearing had rendered him obnoxious to every one.

'So the whirligig of time brings about its revenge,' said old Tunley, the butler; 'pride always goes before a fall.'

'Yes!' coincided John Balderstone, with an angry smirk on his face; 'now, Master Hew may go to Hecklebirnie!'

'Where is that?'

'Three miles beyond—well, a very warm place, as our Scots proverb has it,' added the factor, as he drained a stiff jorum in Mr. Tunley's pantry.

Mrs. Garth rejoiced openly at the change that had come to pass.

'It would have been unnatural indeed,' she said, 'that a girl so sweet and sensitive as Mary should have been mated to Hew, whose actions, nature, and habits would have jarred on her softer nature perpetually.'

And Sir Piers heard her, ever and anon, making such remarks as this, without according the angry response they would once infallibly have elicited; while to Mary the relief was inexpressible! But meantime, where was Cecil now? This question was ever in her mind, causing an aching, gnawing anxiety there, amounting to positive physical pain; and she heard it daily on

the lips of all around her, Hew excepted; and once in his cups the latter expressed to John Balderstone a fierce hope that 'the absent heir might be——'

'Stop, sir!' cried John; 'where?'

'Oh, anywhere,' replied Hew, with an angry gloom in his bilious-looking eyes; 'I am not particular as to climate, or locality.'

So far as Mary was concerned, his occupation was gone, like his hopes of everything now; and, gentle and tender though she was, Mary, remembering all the past, could feel no pity for him.

'Dear old Snarley!' she once exclaimed, catching up her pet terrier, and then talking *at* Hew; 'you, at least, have always loved me for myself alone—no thought have you of fortunes or acres, of rent-rolls and bank-notes; you would rather have a marrow-bone, than all—wouldn't you, my darling doggie?'

And Hew eyed her, and the dog too, viciously. He could no longer, as before, coarsely and vulgarly, taunt Mary with

the obscurity of Cecil's birth, now that it was proved beyond all doubt to be superior to his own; neither could he avail himself now, as before, of the general's countenance and support, since his rival was the real heir of line and entail; while he was but a penniless dependent.

How bitterly and unwillingly, again and again, he anathematised the hour, in which that—to him—fatal packet was so inopportunely discovered by John Balderstone, and its blighting contents brought to light!

Had it only, by fate, been left forgotten, unknown in its place of concealment, for a year or so more, all might have gone well with him; but now—now—he could only curse heavily and grind his teeth in the impotency of his wrath and the deep bitterness of his disappointment.

'All the world's a stage, and the men and women only players;' but he who had played the deliberate villain in the drama of Cecil's life as yet, was still unmasked, and Hew grinned with malicious triumph as he thought of that.

The generous Sir Piers felt that he owed Hew some reparation for the loss of his Indian appointment, and the heavy blight that had fallen on all the prospects once before him; and he hoped that if Hew would only settle down to work and study, that something—he knew not precisely what—might be done for him yet; but Hew, exasperated by the trick fortune had played him, and the humiliating change in his position, had taken heavily to the bottle of late, and his naturally savage nature became at times inflamed to the verge of madness.

Mary was inevitably lost to him now; and that which he deemed much more important—her money! But if Cecil could be removed—crushed—destroyed—thrust out of his path and of this life too—he, Hew, would again be the heir of entail—heir to Eaglescraig and the baronetcy.

But where was Cecil now?

Could he but discover him—could he but cross his path, he would not be over particular about how he got rid of him;

and at such times dark and terrible thoughts possessed him.

To drown care, and as a source of excitement, he had plunged deeper into his dissipations; he had become a more frequent visitor at race-courses, where a very little of his own money went into the pockets of others, while a good deal of the money of others accrued to him, by some mysterious process. He also stuck to his card playing—écarté being, as of old, his favourite game; and unless each rubber thereat represented a sum larger than he deemed sufficient to give zest to the game, even écarté had no charms for him.

Some of his escapades drew upon him the indignation of the general, and feeling himself all but discarded, his absences from Eaglescraig became longer and more frequent; so that none there knew precisely of his haunts or whereabouts, till the portly Mr. Tunley brought the startling intelligence one day that 'after a terrible bout of delirious trimmins, Master Hew was—or believed himself to be—dying, at

the Montgomerie Arms Inn,' where he prayed the general in pity to come and see him once again.

Accompanied by a medical adviser and old John Balderstone, Sir Piers at once rode to the old posting-house indicated; and there, pale, wan, hollow cheeked, and with eyes unnaturally sunk and bloodshot, he found his once favoured protégé in a state that shocked him.

Hew was far from dying yet, as the doctor averred; and Sir Piers too—he 'had seen too much of that sort of thing up country, not to know all about it;' but, in his lowness and perturbation of spirit, Hew firmly believed that the hour of his demise was close indeed; and clinging to the hand of Sir Piers, while moaning and sobbing, he confessed how he had cheated and swindled often, and how he had maligned Cecil in many ways, and more than all, the cruel trick he had played him, on the night of the ball, by drugging his wine.

He uttered a veritable howl of dismay,

and fell back in his bed, when he saw the sudden expression of horror, rage, and shame, that mingled in the face of the honourable old soldier, in whose heart there swelled up a great emotion of pity for Cecil.

He fiercely withdrew his hand from Hew's despairing and tenacious clutch, and started back a pace from the bed whereon the culprit lay.

'It is well that we have all heard this confession of a crime, as black as assassination—a confession which I request you both to commit to memory, and you, John Balderstone, most carefully to writing. As for you, sir,' he added, with a withering glance at Hew, 'I shall never look upon your face again, and now leave you with the doctor and your own conscience, if you have such a thing about you! Order my horse,' he concluded, as he rang the bell, and quitted the room without glancing again at Hew, whose wasted face was buried in the pillows, among which he was groaning heavily.

Buried in deep, anxious, and angry thoughts—angry with himself too—the general rode slowly home.

So—so—this was the secret and true character of Hew Montgomerie—a blackleg—a cheat—the perpetrator of a great villany, on an innocent man! 'When anything in which we have most believed, grows shadowy and unreal, we are apt to grow unreal to ourselves;' and the general, who had once believed greatly in Hew, now knew not what to think.

'Jealousy and avarice are the meanest of passions,' he thought, and terribly had Hew given full swing to both. 'Jealousy, I know, has driven people to incredible acts of deceit; but this act of Hew's has been, beyond all calculations, infamous!'

'It has been just as my heart foreboded!' said Mary to Mrs. Garth, when the revelation reached them, and the measure of her horror of Hew was now full. She then thanked Heaven for her wealth, that she might share it with the

bruised and the fallen; but whither was he gone?

Alas! no one could find the smallest clue to it.

After the revelation, which fear of death had wrung from him, Hew recovered rapidly, and made many a solemn promise 'to eschew horseflesh and bits of painted pasteboard;' but it was only a case of 'the devil was sick,' etc., for when well he plunged into his old bad courses, far exceeding the allowance the general so generously made to him, and then he disappeared for a time.

Autumn had come now; the crops had been gathered, and the gleaners were busy on the upland slopes and fertile braes of Cunninghame and Kyle; the last of the high-piled wains had gone homeward over the furrowed fields and through the leafy grass lanes that led to the picturesque rickyard; the fern and heath-covered wastes were in all their beauty, the great gorse-bushes in all their golden bloom, and

the woodlands wore many a varied hue, from dark-green to russet-brown and pallid yellow.

Since the discovery made by John Balderstone, and the revelations of Hew, the general had been rather a changed and broken-down man; but he now clung to Mary Montgomerie more than ever, and daily she drove him in her pony-carriage—the same in which Cecil was wont to accompany her, wrapped cosily up in the skins of animals he had shot in India—handling the ribbons so prettily with her gauntleted little hands, and always comporting herself so sweetly and tenderly to him, and just as a favourite daughter would have done.

He felt that a great crime had been committed against one who was his own flesh and blood; and that, in ignorance, he had condoned that crime; and, more than all, in society had visited it with all the acrimony he deemed due and proper to the occasion.

'I have again been guilty of rash judg-

ment—of indiscretion and of cruelty!' he said again and again to himself in secret; and his mind drew painful pictures of the ruined Cecil, a wanderer or outcast, perhaps in penury, misery, and despair, driven, it might be, to suicide; and, remembering the real or fancied vision he had seen in time past, had a nervous and childish fear of perhaps beholding another.

Already had the father been wronged; and now, how much more deeply the son! Was a curse coming upon his race—a curse like that which blighted the Campbells of Glenlyon, and more than one other family, for some crime committed in ages past? It almost seemed so; and he had no language wherewith to express his loathing of Hew, and the cunning and cowardice of the latter.

Tidings of Cecil or how to trace him, were the daily thought of all at Eaglescraig, and the general wrote again and again, but vainly, to Leslie Fotheringhame, to Dick Freeport, Acharn, and other members of the corps on the subject; but

none could afford the slightest clue to the mystery that enveloped his disappearance.

The presence of friends, if not avoided, was certainly not courted at Eaglescraig now; even the general forgot his reminiscences of India and the Cameronians in this new anxiety, and the days passed slowly, gloomily, and monotonously on, till Mary bethought her of Annabelle Erroll, who she knew had a sorrow of her own, and pressed her to visit them again.

The curiously and mysteriously worded advertisements inserted by John Balderstone in the second column of the *Times*, concerning Cecil, and seeking some knowledge of his whereabouts, never reached him by the banks of the Morava, or beyond the slopes of the Balkan mountains; and fears began to gather in the hearts of those who loved him, that if not gone to the Antipodes, he must be dead!

'I am breaking up, John,' he would say querulously to his old friend, 'and am about as much use now as a Scotch M.P. or a third wheel to a field-piece!'

Yet, as we are all creatures of habit, he adhered to his old ways mechanically. As an Indian veteran, accustomed to be up at gun-fire and when the cantonment ghurries clanged, he was always wont to be abroad early; and there was one morning, which he never forgot, when he was up and about earlier than usual.

He had been through the stables with Pate Pastern, the groom, and seen the carriage-horses, his own roadster, Mary's pad and her ponies; he had been with old Dibble, the gardener, about potting the flowers, though he scarcely knew a daffodil from a rhododendron; had seen the shepherd off to look after the cattle, and now came the postman with the letters and papers; but he tossed them all aside and muttered:

'What can interest me now?'

But Mary always had the power of rousing and interesting him, and, breakfast over, she began to read the morning paper aloud, as she often did, for he loved to hear her silvery voice. She turned, as was her wont with him, to the Indian news, though

many a hearty laugh he had at her haphazard pronunciation of Hindostanee names and words; and, after giving him all the news from Simla, Calcutta, and so forth, her eyes fell on those from the Danubian provinces and the East; and she was in the act of reading, when her voice broke; as a swelling came into her throat she stopped, and, while tightly clutching her paper, fell back in her chair, with her face deadly pale.

'Mary, my darling, you are ill; what is the matter?' exclaimed Sir Piers, starting from his easy-chair and ringing the bell furiously.

'News of Cecil!' she replied, faintly.

'News of Cecil—when—how?'

'See, see! oh, heavens!' she exclaimed, smoothing out the paper and then pushing back her hair from her temples.

It was the special correspondent's detailed account of the battle by the Morava, and the singular gallantry of 'the British volunteer, Mr. Cecil Falconer,' in rescuing and remounting General Tchernaieff, after

a brigade of Cossacks had given way; of his promotion and decoration with the Takova cross, and all that the reader already knows.

Tremulously the general read the notice again and again, with a glow of pride and joy in his old face—joy in which Mary did not fully share, for dread of the perils surrounding the absent one was her immediate second thought; but all suspense—all uncertainty were ended now. The absent, the wronged, and the lost one was discovered, but oh how far away!

'My boy's boy! my boy's boy!' muttered Sir Piers, wiping his spectacles, which had become covered with moisture. 'Tunley, call Mrs. Garth—the chief of my household staff—she must hear of this at once. Quick, she is in the compound!' he added, referring to the garden, as an Anglo-Indian never rids himself of his old associations. And motherly old Mrs. Garth, who was looking just as we saw her last, with her grey hair thick and soft, and with keen bright eyes under a pair of shrewd Scotch

eyebrows, heard with genuine joy the sudden tidings of Cecil, for whom she had always had the strongest regard.

The day was passed in surmises and plans for the future, and Mary hurried away to her own room, to find perfect seclusion at last—away from all! She locked her door; threw off her dress as if it stifled her; donned her robe de toilette; let down the masses of her hair for coolness, threw them over her shoulders, and sat down with her dimpled chin resting in the pinky palm of her left hand, to think—think—think it all out.

What should she do? Write!

She threw open her desk and blotting-pad; but her brain was too excited—her poor heart beat too fast and too painfully to permit her to steady her thoughts, and she paced to and fro, so wearily.

'Thank heaven, dear Annabelle is coming!' she exclaimed more than once.

This battle by the Morava had been fought, by the date given, more than a month ago. A whole month! What

might not have happened since then? In what fresh perils might not Cecil have been plunged? And much *had* happened, such as the gentle mind of Mary could not have conceived, or deemed possible, in this age of the world.

Now the news of the Servian war—a war to her hitherto unknown or devoid of interest—became suddenly invested with a new and terrible importance.

The regiment, of course, heard betimes of Cecil's exploit and the honours awarded him; and, as may readily be supposed, the mess had quite an ovation in consequence.

For certain cogent reasons of his own, Hew Montgomerie heard the tidings with unmixed satisfaction.

'In Servia—fighting in Servia, of all places in the world!' he muttered; 'if he only gets knocked on the head, I may find my old place at Eaglescraig again! But he may escape and come safely home. Why should I not go to Servia, and mar his future in some fashion?' he added, as a dark and cruel expression stole into his

shifty eyes; 'but how to get there—and where the devil *is* Servia?'

Hew's ideas on geography were decidedly vague, and even Bradshaw failed to show how he could get there; but, intent on his diabolical thoughts nevertheless, he continued to think and to mutter:

'Fighting, is he! A bullet may rid me of him—rid me all the sooner that, no doubt, he sets little store upon his life now. Anyway, I should like it soon to be settled whether I am to have Eaglescraig after all!'

And he began to consider intently how he could reach Servia before Cecil could hear of his changed fortune; in what capacity he could act when there; what was the language spoken; where was the money to come from with which he was to travel? And for some days he resolved himself into a species of committee of ways and means, combined with many dark, cruel and malignant thoughts.

CHAPTER II.

THE COINCIDENCE.

ON her way to Eaglescraig, Annabelle Erroll proceeded by way of Glasgow, and had barely taken her seat in the compartment of a first-class railway carriage, when a gentleman entered, and took his place at an opposite corner. Then the train glided out of the station; smoky Tradeston on the right, and the dense masses of the ancient Gorbals on the left, were quickly far behind, and the view on either side became more open, as it sped on its way; and ere long Annabelle forgot all about her companion, in watch-

ing the estuary of the Clyde, the rock of Dumbarton, the mighty blue mass of Ben Lomond, and the glorious panorama of the hills of Argyle.

Her companion had leisurely opened a courier bag, and taken therefrom various serials, without offering one to her, as she sat with averted face, intent on the scenery. He seemed one of those composed travellers who can hear unmoved the scream and whistle of any number of engines; the startling shout of 'Change here!' as the train pulled up at some confusing junction, from where travellers branched off in all directions—some the right, but many the wrong; and where leisurely and indolent porters spent the stirring yet monotonous day in cramming passengers and portmanteaus into carriages, to get rid of them as fast as possible for the next batch of portmanteaus and passengers, without caring whither they went or what became of them.

He could see, by furtive glances over the top of his paper, that his companion

was a tall and elegant girl, faultlessly attired in a rich sealskin, with gold ornaments; with feet and hands which—when the latter left her tiny muff—were well-shaped and small. There was a haughty grace in the carriage of her handsome head; she wore a smart hat, and a thick black veil tied over her face effectually concealed her features. He took in all this at a glance as he settled himself to his newspaper, while she scarcely dared to breathe, as in him she had now recognised Leslie Fotheringhame!

Where was he going—what was he doing here, in 'mufti' too? The calm, high-bred face, to which the dark eyebrows and thick, black, heavy moustache imparted so much character—the face that was ever dwelling in her memory was before her again. In repose, she thought it seemed older than it should have been, or was wont to be; and when eventually he did venture to address her, when he smiled, it grew young and bright again, like the face she remembered in the

pleasant time beside the Tay, and the last season at Edinburgh.

She saw that he had still at his watch-chain a tiny gold locket, which she remembered well; for it had been her gift to him, and contained a microscopic likeness of herself on one side, and a lock of her golden hair on the other—or *had* done so, when she saw it last.

Did it contain them now, or had they given place to memorials of — of that other woman—a hateful and humiliating thought!

How she longed for an excuse or opportunity to get into another carriage, or for other passengers to come in, ere he recognised her; but the train was an express one, and no addition could be made to their number for some time to come.

Secure, as yet, behind the mask of her veil, she watched him, while her heart beat with lightning-speed, and swelled with unavailing regret. Intent, apparently, on his paper, he had not recognised her. He had, of course, ceased to care for her,

she thought, when he had learned to love that other one; and so now, her coming and her going, her joy and her sorrow, were nothing to him—were less than the snow of last winter!

Yet she was woman enough to love him now, when breathing the same atmosphere with him—seated within a yard of him—to love him, in these the days of his biting indifference, even as she had done in those when a smile of hers could bring him so winningly to her side.

'What a fool I am!' she thought; 'oh, I hate myself! Would that I were a man—they can so easily forget!'

At that moment one of her bracelets became unclasped and fell at his feet.

He picked it up, and not sorry, perhaps, for an excuse to address her, said simply: 'Permit me?' and clasped it round her white and shapely wrist.

'Thanks,' she replied as briefly; but her voice, though low, instantly stirred a chord in his heart; the memory of her figure rushed upon him; he gazed keenly at

the fair face half hidden by its veil of lace.

'Annabelle—Miss Erroll!' said he, in a strange voice, while lifting his hat, and half offering a hand: a motion which she ignored, and felt herself grow pallid in being discovered at last—pallid with something of anger too, for, with all her natural sweetness, Annabelle had a heart of pride.

'We are old friends,' said he, with some confusion or emotion of manner; 'at least we can be that?'

'Not even that, I fear,' said she, with affected firmness; and then added a little irrelevantly: 'would that I had never come here; an express train, too—how provoking!'

'Is my company so hateful—or are we to be enemies now?'

'As you please,' she replied, with growing irritation, for, her secret sentiments apart, the sudden situation exasperated her, after all that had occurred. 'To meet you here was, at least, the last thing I could have expected.'

'Or wished?'

'I have no reason for not replying in the affirmative—yes.'

He sighed, and for a moment looked out of the window at the past-flying landscape, across which the white cloud of the engine smoke was whirling. After a pause, he asked in a tone of assumed indifference:

'Are you going far by this train?'

'Far or near cannot possibly interest you, Captain Fotheringhame; but I may mention that I am going to Eaglescraig in Cunninghame.'

'Eaglescraig!' he exclaimed, forgetting his pretended calmness of manner.

'And you?' she inquired, for she had a tender interest in him, in spite of herself.

'I am going there too,' he replied, with the slightest twinkle of mischief in his handsome eyes.

'By invitation?' asked Annabelle, aghast, conceiving that her friend Mary had formed some scheme concerning them.

'No; I have volunteered a visit to the

general, out of my friendship for Cecil Falconer—or Montgomerie, we must call him now. I have seen several notices concerning him in the public prints; I know all about his changed fortunes, and I want to be of service, if I can, to him and the old general. Thus I took this train, by a singular coincidence.'

'One I would have avoided, could I have known, foreseen, what was thereby involved.'

'Do not say so, I implore you,' said he.

She made no response to this; but sat with her face resolutely turned to the carriage window, while biting her cherry nether lip, and with difficulty restraining tears of vexation behind her veil; while Fotheringhame, as he looked at her, thought just then that no woman could compare with her—not even Mary Montgomerie—in his eyes; and he longed to see her face unveiled, but dared not, in her present mood, venture to hint of such a wish.

As his presence seemed to give her such

extreme annoyance, he felt half inclined to relinquish his plan of visiting Sir Piers; but then he had written to the latter, announcing his intention of coming, and had obtained two or three days' leave for that special purpose.

The recent tidings of Cecil in the public prints—the brilliant exploit he had performed in the war in Servia—'in Servia, of all places in the world,' as Fotheringhame said—fortunately gave this luckless pair of travellers a kind of neutral ground on which to meet—a neutral subject on which to converse, apart from themselves; but in no instance can a man and a woman who have ever been *more* to each other than friends meet, after parting under any circumstances, without having emotion of a deeper kind—be it love, or be it hate—than ordinary individuals. Thus, ever and anon the conversation of these two manifested a decided tendency to take a personal and explanatory turn; yet they sat rigidly apart, each in their own corner of the carriage.

'Poor Cecil!' said Fotheringhame; 'he may have tired of treading life's dull road ere the report of his good fortune reaches him—the heir of an old baronetcy and an estate.'

'With the affection of a dear girl like Mary Montgomerie too!'

'True,' added Fotheringhame, with much sadness of tone; 'she does not forget, as some so readily can, what Motherwell calls "the love of life's young day."'

Thinking that, if not acting, this remark conveyed a taunt, Annabelle said:

'You seem somewhat changed in way and manner since we saw each other last.'

'If so, I have had good reason therefor.'

'You were once gay enough, and happy too.'

'Happy when you made me so; but Heaven knows, Annabelle,' he exclaimed, with sudden emotion, 'that gaiety and pleasure have long been strangers to me.'

'So duplicity brings about its own

punishment,' she replied, pointedly and pitilessly.

'Duplicity?' said he, looking up with a surprise that seemed at least genuine; 'I do not understand—you slighted my visits —returned my letters——'

'Good reason had I to do so. I had hoped we might avoid this subject——'

'Reason?' he queried, as her voice broke.

'Remember your mysterious friend,' said Annabelle, bitterly; 'she was *not* Blanche Gordon; so who was she—what was she? But I despise myself for asking!'

'She was then what she is no longer now—an unhappy creature,' was the enigmatical reply, from which Annabelle, whose pride revolted from making further inquiries, drew all kinds of singular deductions.

And now, at this crisis in their conversation, the train stopped, and as an influx took place of those fresh passengers so longed for by Annabelle a short time before, it could not be resumed in any form, and the rest of the journey was performed by them in silence, or nearly so.

CHAPTER III.

EAGLESCRAIG ONCE MORE.

MARY, in the general's snug and well-appointed old family carriage, with a stately hammer-cloth and heraldically bedecked panels, awaited Annabelle at the railway station; and though expecting Leslie Fotheringhame at the same time, and quite prepared to welcome him warmly as Cecil's friend and whilom brother officer, and though not surprised to see him arrive, she was certainly surprised to find that he and Annabelle had come *together*, and clapped her little ungloved hands merrily, as she received them, in a childlike way that

almost provoked the latter, who was a proud and rather reserved girl.

She coloured deeply and with positive vexation, even under the eye of her dearest friend, for thus arriving at the same time, by the same train, and in the same carriage, with Leslie Fotheringhame; and this emotion made her more shy, more resentful to him apparently, and more resolved to keep as much as possible aloof from him.

And he, piqued by this, of which he was speedily conscious, conceived a vague and direful jealousy of some person as yet unknown, and it coloured his manner accordingly.

For the first time, on this occasion, he saw fully the soft fair face of Annabelle, as she raised her veil, and her velvet-like lips met those of Mary. Would they ever touch his again?

The weather was duly discussed, and the advent of Snarley gave them something to talk of, as that much-petted cur was nestling cosily under the skin of a man-eater that would have gobbled him

up at a mouthful; and he now welcomed both with much yelping and effusiveness.

Mary felt the situation of her friends to be an awkward one, and exerted herself to make both feel at ease, as they drove under the evening sunshine to Eaglescraig, where both were welcomed by Sir Piers in the grand old dining-hall, the oak panels of which were nearly hidden by ancestral portraits, and from the tall windows of which there was a noble view of mountain and coppice, of rocky cliffs and the far-stretching Firth of the dark blue Clyde; and at the elbow of the host stood old Tunley, with a silver salver of decanters and glasses.

'Too late for tiffin and too early for dinner, Fotheringhame,' said the general; 'just a nip to keep the cold out, and then the dressing-bell will ring, and Tunley will see that you are attended to.'

Tunley, like most of the old servants, many of whom had been born on the estate, had but one creed—the welfare of the family of Eaglescraig. Their sorrow

had been sincere when 'Master Piers come to evil,' with his father; and it had been renewed now by the strange story of Cecil, which had, of course, taken a powerful hold of their fancies; thus he and they all viewed the advent of Fotheringhame with the deepest interest, believing that he was in some mysterious way to restore the wanderer to his home, and was, indeed, but the forerunner of that event.

One word more about Tunley. The poor man felt ashamed of one feature in his past blameless life, and daily intercourse with the general and Mrs. Garth made him feel it keenly; for this most respectable of British butlers had never served, even for an hour, in the Cameronians, and this he deemed somewhat of a blot upon his scutcheon.

'Mrs. Captain Garth, of course, you remember,' said the general to Fotheringhame (who was imbibing a liqueur glass of mountain-dew), indicating the old lady, who was seated in an easy-chair, holding a hand-

screen to shield her face from the glow of the fire; 'widow of my old friend Garth of Ours—and now, I think, we all know each other.'

Sir Piers had some vague idea that there had been a flirtation—a lovers' quarrel, or some such folly—between Leslie Fotheringhame and Annabelle Erroll; but that was nothing to the old man—they would square it, no doubt, if they were so disposed. And he thought only of making welcome his guest—a Cameronian too!—friend of his grandson, who had been so horribly used; and as for Annabelle, Mary would look after her.

Dinner duly came, and passed with the usual commonplace conversation; the presence of the servants precluding all from talking freely, and conversing on the matter nearest their hearts—the volunteer in Servia. But Fotheringhame, from his place by Mary's side, had but one thought — how surpassing fair looked Annabelle! Her dress was a plain and simple muslin one; a blue flower of some

kind was amid the masses of her golden hair, and the brother of it nestled amid the soft lace in the swell of her bosom.

After the ladies had returned to the drawing-room, the object which had brought him to Eaglescraig seemed half forgotten for a time, and his thoughts had followed her; but now the hospitable general was pushing the decanters to and fro; Tunley had withdrawn; and anon Fotheringhame roused himself, for he was full of joyous enthusiasm at distinction won by his friend in a foreign service, though he cordially wished that he had never been driven to seek it there—a service in which he had been driven by desperation to seek a new home; and Fotheringhame quite won the heart of the general, who now—in all that Cecil had done and achieved—was assured that he saw but the reflection and reproduction of his own character, vaguely known as 'a chip of the old block,' and that it was from *him* that Cecil inherited all this fire and spirit. He became quite jovial, and ere the evening was

over began to sing, in a very quavering treble, snatches of 'the old Subadahr.'

'At the mess, we knew not what to think of his disappearance,' said Fotheringhame, playing with his walnuts; 'some hinted of California and the Rocky Mountains, others of Ballarat, the Diamond Fields of Natal, the Cape war and the Zulus, and everywhere else that the desperate and the broken——'

'The desperate and the broken!' sighed the general, setting down an untasted glass.

'Yes, Sir Piers—go to mend their fortunes, to seek excitement, oblivion, and too often to end their lives; but certainly no man among us ever thought of Servia!'

'It was most kind of you to volunteer this visit, Fotheringhame, to assist me with your advice and knowledge of a European world that is somewhat new to me now,' said Sir Piers, grasping his hand.

'Not at all, Sir Piers; I would do anything to serve Cecil. I thought two heads might be better than one; I am younger and more active than you——'

'But, egad, I have seen the day!'

'And so, I thought, we must talk the matter over at leisure, yet without delay.'

'All right—the decanters stand with you. And now, Fotheringhame, you are aware of how he was a victim of a vile scheme—how his wine was drugged by a scoundrel whose attested confession I possess?'

Aware of how deep had once been the general's interest in Mr. Hew Caddish Montgomerie, Fotheringhame merely bowed an assent; and, after a few minutes' silence, inquired where he was now?

'None know, and none care,' replied the general, hotly; 'he has disappeared altogether—let us hope for ever. But if life lasts me, by the Heaven that hears me, I shall set the honour of my boy right and clear before the regiment, the Horse Guards, and the world, or lay my commission at the foot of the throne!'

'In an affair of jealousy——'

'Jealousy!' exclaimed the general, with a fierce grimace; 'we settled these, and

other affairs, differently in my time, before the service went to the dogs. Egad! I knew a fellow, when I was a sub at Vellore, who was shot for declining to dine at a certain mess-table. Did you ever hear the story?'

'No, general!'

'Well, you see, it happened in this way,' began Sir Piers, who, having obtained an audience, fell back at once into his old Indian train of thought. 'We were cantonned at Nussirabad, in the wild black province of Ajmir, with the 76th Bengal Native Infantry, when there came from England, to join that corps, a Captain Evelyn, a quiet and gentlemanly young fellow, whom all liked, save some of the 76th, who, sooth to say, were nearly all fiery rackety Irishmen, and by no means good examples of the Emerald Isle; for cards, brandy-pawnee, and incessant uproar were the order of the day, and of the night too, in every bungalow in their lines, generally finishing at a very late hour by breaking each other's heads with the

billiard-cues, and shying the balls out of the windows; while they were born-devils at pig-sticking, horse-racing, and not a pretty ayah was safe within ten coss of them. Such were the officers of the *Mori-artie-ka-Pultan*, for the corps had been raised by an Irishman, and bore his name.

'Evelyn declined to join their mess, not on that account, but because he wished to live economically, being engaged to a young lady who was coming up country, chaperoned by Mrs. Erroll, the mother of Mary's friend, then a young and lovely matron—a mere girl in fact, and travelling *dawk*, as we all did in those days; and with the utmost politeness he explained all this to the president of the mess committee. That personage, a certain Captain Darby O'Dowd, swore that this was a distinct affront to the whole corps, and that Evelyn must be paraded about gunfire. The mess consisted of sixteen, and as he could not fight them all, they leisurely cast lots, and the task fell to O'Dowd, who challenged Evelyn, with the intimation that if he—

the valiant Darby—fell, the next in seniority would take his place.

'Evelyn was too high-spirited to decline this outrageous challenge, and they met at gunfire, in the open plain, while the sun was as yet below the hills of Ajmir. I remember it all as if it were yesterday, for I had the mainguard.

'Evelyn, thinking, no doubt, of the girl who was far away, and whom he might never see again, standing with his second, worthy John Garth of Ours, pale and sad, yet resolute in aspect, on one hand; on the other, O'Dowd, with his second, a Captain O'Spudd, and all the mess of the 76th, anxious to have their turn in the shooting, grouped close by, and pale and bloated enough they looked in the cold, half light of the unrisen sun as it stole across the plain, and all shaky enough with their over-night potations.

'"Having no personal injury to redress, gentlemen, I decline to fire," exclaimed Evelyn, in a loud, firm voice.

'"Plaze yourself, me boy," replied the

relentless O'Dowd as he fired; and, shot through the heart, poor Evelyn fell dead on his face!

'Even in those days there was a devil of a row about this remarkable duel, and it was a close shave with O'Dowd escaping being hung for it; but a verdict of "Not guilty" was returned, and he was killed soon after in action by a grape-shot; and O'Spudd died of a sunstroke in the jungle, and was buried there in his blanket.'

The general followed up this by many other stories, all more or less bloodthirsty, till his guest became somewhat silent—bored by them, no doubt; and then he said:

'Fotheringhame, the sherry stands with you—just "a whitewasher," and then we shall join the ladies.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIVIDED PAIR.

MRS. GARTH was dozing dreamily before the fire, and the two girls were at the piano, when the general and Fotheringhame entered the drawing-room.

They were idling over the instrument, before which Annabelle was seated, and over the keys of which Mary was occasionally running her fingers, as if apparently to conceal a little confidential conversation that was in progress between them.

'You'll have a turn with the guns to-morrow, Fotheringhame,' said the general,

'but you must excuse my absence; my day is past for that sort of thing. The rocketers I once could bring down, pass over my head contemptuously now; and bullfinches seem much bigger in the hunting-field than they used to be, so I funk them entirely, and seek a quiet gate, as I don't like to come a spread eagle into the field; and, by Jove! the doctor has already hinted about a respirator. D——n! fancy a fellow at the head of a brigade with a respirator! I was nearly drowned the other day, and would have been but for Mary, when landing a twenty-pound pike from Eaglescraig Loch; so it is time I gave over these little vanities, and left them to my juniors and successors; though, Heaven knows, that if I was anxious about my estate in this world just when it is time to be thinking of the other, it was not for myself, but for those who are to come after me,' added the general in a softened tone, for now much of the peppery nature of the old stock-comedy guardian

had left him. 'Fond of music, Fotheringhame?' he asked, after a pause.

'Very.'

'Ah; dare say we shall find you something in that way. Mary is no bad performer.'

'Pray excuse me — to-night,' urged Mary.

'Then I won't excuse Annabelle,' said the general, patting the shoulder of the latter, while Fotheringhame drew near; 'do favour us with the little song I have so often heard you sing with such extreme sweetness and pathos.'

'Which, Sir Piers?'

'What is it? oh yes—"Love me always, love me ever," or something of that kind. There must be some tender association connected with it, I am sure,' continued Sir Piers, in utter ignorance of how his remarks cut two ways, like a double-edged sword.

'I have not the music—and—and I have quite forgotten the words,' replied Annabelle, growing painfully pale, and wishing

that the floor would open and swallow her up, conscious that Leslie Fotheringhame was standing at her back. The latter saw the ill-concealed emotion that pervaded her whole frame, and he felt keenly for her.

'Is this girl to be, for good or for evil, my destiny after all?' he thought, as he regarded with his old admiration the beauty of her refined face and her brilliant complexion—that dazzling and wonderful fairness which almost invariably accompanies the possession of golden and auburn hair.

Annabelle did not leave the piano; it afforded her a pretext for keeping her face turned from those around her, and, impelled by some new emotion, she sang in succession some of her gayest and most effective songs, while Fotheringhame hovered near, leaving to Mary the task of turning the music, and steadily and keenly he regarded the singer. Was this gaiety real, or was she acting a part? he thought; and seeing that he came nearer, Mary withdrew.

'You regard me with surprise,' said Annabelle, finding his eyes fixed on her, and feeling a desperate necessity for saying something. Indeed, they had scarcely spoken since leaving the railway carriage.

'Certainly, I am surprised,' said he; 'I did not expect to be standing by your side thus, and hearing your voice again.'

Full fell the light of the chandelier on the lovely upturned eyes that did not soften in the least, as he hoped they would do, at his slight allusion to the past.

'Captain Fotheringhame,' said Annabelle, quite calmly, and in an ordinary tone, 'you look at me as though I were somehow changed.'

'Oh, you are not in the least changed, he replied, in a low voice, and with a bitter smile; 'you are volatile and—cruel as ever.'

'Cruel!' she repeated, under cover of a musical crash, while the colour rushed to her cheeks and delicate neck; but she disdained to say more, and thus, to one or two half-broken utterances of his, finding

that she made no response, Fotheringhame drew back and rejoined the general.

How long was all this to go on? was Annabelle's bitter thought. In the old time, by the silver birches on the Tay-side, they had met, loved, quarrelled, and parted, she thought, for ever; but to meet and quarrel again with just cause on one side, with the prayer in her heart that they might never look in each other's faces again, and here they were now, by an unexpected coincidence, a strange freak of destiny, under the same roof, and in the same room, compelled to meet at least as mutual friends!

Thus, when they parted for the night, his voice was as calm and his smile and bow as coldly polite as her own. Then he and the general withdrew to the smoking-room to talk over Cecil's affairs, and scheme out some plan for his future, and the girls gladly sought their rooms, which adjoined each other, and plunged at once into gossip and hair-dressing.

For weeks and weeks past Mary's life

had been one of dull routine; she had fed her pet birds, her pigeons, watched her flowers, and watered her ferns, as usual; it was *such* a relief to do, or be doing, anything: but now that Annabelle Erroll had come, she felt almost happy in her companionship—for both had enough to talk about.

'Have you met as acquaintances merely?' asked Mary, with eagerness.

'Yes; but acquaintances of a peculiar kind, certainly. How could it be otherwise, after all that has passed between us? I must studiously ignore the past,' continued Annabelle; 'nor shall his strange and sharp allusion to it move me, save in the way of annoyance and surprise.'

To her it seemed very strange and unaccountable that Leslie Fotheringhame should adopt an indignant tone with her, as if *he* were the wronged party, and that she had nothing to complain of in reference to his conduct with the unknown lady.

'Why did he so studiously, so cruelly

deceive me?' she exclaimed, on the verge of tears; 'but that I inherit the spirit of my father, the old colonel, he would have broken my heart—I loved him so!'

'Poor Annabelle!' said Mary, caressing her; 'twice engaged, and twice separated—you are a curious pair. Let us hope that the third time may prove successful and irrevocable!'

'Never!' exclaimed Annabelle. Did he not openly tell me that she—that woman—is happy now? What did he mean by that?—for there was something of mournful exultation in his tone!'

'It is all very strange,' said Mary, in perplexity; 'can there have been some simple, yet perhaps inexplicable, mistake at the bottom of this unhappy business?'

'No, Mary—I tell you no!' replied Annabelle, with angry energy; 'the woman in the matter was a fact palpable enough. And what can the unexplained mystery of his interest in her be? and is it not to him degradation, and to me insult?'

'Unexplained; it might not have been.'

'How?'

'You forget the rejected correspondence—the last unopened letter.'

'Anyway,' replied Annabelle, with a forced laugh, 'unlike the Grande Duchesse, I shall no longer dote upon the military. I'll look out for an easy-going parson, or plain country gentleman, and, as Hawley Smart says, "more weddings take place from pique than the world wotteth of," and Hawley is right.' Then, dropping this tone, she twined her white arms round her friend, and, gazing into her soft face, said, 'Dear Mary, how poorly you are looking!'

'Well, have I not had much cause for anxiety, and tears too, think you?'

'No man, I believe now, is worth the grief that robs a woman of her peace and rest.'

'Oh, Annabelle, the thought of Leslie Fotheringhame embitters you; but I sorrow for Cecil—and there are men and men, remember. How strange it seems

that now I must think and speak of him not as Falconer (his mother's name), but as Cecil Montgomerie!' she added, with a soft smile, gazing on vacancy.

'I thought,' said Annabelle, after a pause, 'that I should have died when dear old Sir Piers so awkwardly asked me to sing that stupid song to-night—died of shame and mortification! Surely no woman has ever been more thoroughly humbled than I! How unfortunate all this is!' she added, almost weeping with vexation; 'mamma knew of our engagement, and that he is my cousin. She knows how shamefully he treated me after the night of that most unlucky ball; and all about that—that person—the woman with the golden-hazel eyes; and how shall I be able to convince her, proud, resentful, and justly-suspicious as she is, that our meeting here is a miserable coincidence—a circumstance beyond my control?'

'It looks like Fate, my dear Belle.'

'Fate? How can you romance so after all that has happened?'

'What happened may be a mistake—a coincidence, too — explainable perhaps, though I have not much hope of that. If dear Cecil were but home, he might clear it all up for us. Home! when will that be? Soon, I hope—oh, so soon!' she added, as she kissed her friend and sought her pillow.

Annabelle lay far into the night awake, revolving endless schemes and conversations in her busy little head. She naturally longed to be gone from Eaglescraig, and nothing but a sure knowledge that Fotheringhame's leave was for a very brief period, pacified her at all. That they should be in the same house, and meeting perpetually at the same table, was intensely awkward under the circumstances of their changed position.

Annabelle felt this keenly, and thus she sedulously avoided Leslie Fotheringhame, who felt conscious that she did so, and misconstrued it either into an aversion for himself, or a regard for some other man—a regard inspired, perhaps, by pique, or wounded self-esteem.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE ACCUSATION.

MEANWHILE how fared it with Cecil, and what was now his fate?

He had permitted the cold, damp earth to be heaped upon him, only moving sufficiently—unseen in the gloom of the night and of the hole wherein he lay—to keep his body, though partially buried, from being so entirely; fortunately, the would-be assassins were satisfied that they had effectually concealed him from the troops, who were certainly in motion close by, and then retired for a time, intending, as they stated, to return shortly, and make sure of their prey.

The moment they were gone, though scarcely daring to breathe, and oblivious of many a sore and bruise, of which he became conscious hours after, Cecil rose, clambered out of the hollow, shook his clothes as free as possible of the soil that had covered him, secured his pistols in his belt anew, and on looking to his sword, thanked heaven that, in his fall, the steel scabbard had saved the blade from injury.

Drawing a long breath, a sigh of relief, he prepared for immediate flight, though giddy, bruised, and weak. Lights were flitting to and fro in the farmhouse close by, and he could actually hear the voices of Guebhard and his Montenegrins, so not a moment was to be lost in retiring. Even the farmer and his people were to be sedulously avoided, and though Cecil did think of his horse, it was chiefly with reference to the impossibility of recovering it.

A sound made him shrink behind a bush, and then he saw one of his late assailants creeping towards the hole, softly,

slowly, stealthily, on his hands and knees, with a yataghan in his teeth, and his eyes turned more than once towards the house from which he had stolen on deadly intent, to anticipate his leader and companions, by finishing off their victim if any life remained in him, and obtaining the valuable diamond ring of Palenka, the despatches and other plunder.

A moment he paused in his progress, irresolutely, for the voice of a cuckoo, roused by the recent noise, was now heard in a tree close by; and the Black Mountaineer, affrighted by an idea of the *vila*, which often assumes, as the Servians also believe, the form of that bird, let the yataghan fall from his mouth.

Ere he could pick it up, Cecil, whose blood was now at fever-heat, passed his sword twice furiously through the body of the wretch, with his foot spurned it headlong into the hole (where, to the bewilderment of Guebhard and his ruffians, it was found some time after), and then, animated by a species of despairing energy, he hurried,

breathless and panting, stumbling heavily at every step, into the thick wood that lay near, intent only on immediate escape and concealment for a time—at least till day broke, and he could look about him; nor did he pause in his flight until he felt assured that some miles lay between him and his enemies.

A great weariness, the result of long and over exertion of mind and body, came over him; and on finding a dry and sheltered place, under the branches of a great laurel bush or tree, he fell fast asleep, fearless of the wild hogs, of which vast numbers feed in the woods.

When he awoke, stiff and benumbed, a silvery mist was rising from the dark green foliage of the forest, and above the mist was the blue sky and the clear bright morning sunshine, as he began to search for a path, which he hoped might lead him to a highway, though such he knew, in Servia, were only to be found in the neighbourhood of towns.

The sound of a cavalry trumpet at no

great distance caught his ear. It gave him a species of electric shock, and he remembered, that to the fears expressed by Guebhard of troops being in the vicinity, he no doubt owed his life. He pressed eagerly, anxiously forward in the direction whence the sound had come, the rabbits scuttling briskly out of his way, as he hurried along a narrow track; and at length he was rewarded by reaching a regular beaten road, on which was a long string of horses and mules laden with provisions, forage, and stores, proceeding under an escort of Russian Lancers from Belgrade to the front—direct to Tchernaieff's headquarters, as the officer in command—a *capitan*—informed him.

The latter, a handsome man, kid-gloved and glazed booted, wore a very dashing uniform; a green tunic, piped with scarlet, faced with black velvet and laced with gold, and on his breast glittered the medals he had won in the expeditions to Khiva and elsewhere, with the orders of St. Andrew and St. Vladimir.

Cecil made his position, his wants, and his recent troubles known in French, which the Ruski spoke fluently. The latter summoned a sergeant, who procured a horse and some food—*i.e.*, biscuits and brandy—for Cecil; and now his heart grew lighter as he rode on and felt himself in perfect safety, but not the less intent on having public or private vengeance upon Captain Mattei Guebhard.

He saw once more the Morava, and after a few hours' riding, was thankful when the escort passed the outposts of the Russo-Servian army at Deligrad, and he could proceed without delay to the quarters of General Tchernaieff.

Inspired more than he had ever been since he came to Servia by the sights and sounds around him—the tents, the huts, the batteries of artillery with their limbers all drawn up wheel to wheel; the cavalry, their horses picketed in close ranks or at exercise upon the plateau; the strains of a magnificent Russian band playing the 'Blue Danube,' and then the 'Manolo'—he

ceased to think or question himself, like Mr. Mallock, 'Is life worth living?' He was too young yet to find that there was nothing in it. Since that bright summer day when Warren Hastings, 'then just seven years of age,' as we are told, 'lay on the bank of a rivulet, which flows through the old domain of his house to join the Isis,' and registered a vow that he would, one day, be lord of Daylesford, how many vows of anticipated honours, wealth and greatness have been registered, that may never have been fulfilled!

But some such emotion—some such hope of a brilliant future, swelled up in the heart of Cecil, as he dismounted from his horse at the door of an edifice, two sentinels before which, and the Russian flag flying thereon, indicating it to be the head-quarters of General Tchernaieff.

Officers and orderlies belonging to every arm of the service, horse, foot, artillery, engineers, hospitals and ambulances, were passing in and out, when Cecil sent in his name to the general, who had just come

from vespers in the little iron church, which had been sent to him by the ladies of Moscow, and in which he had been depositing two or three standards recently taken from the Turks, prior to their transmission to the Emperor at St. Petersburg.

Cecil's jaded aspect, his tattered uniform, soiled, sodden, and of no particular colour now, for the brown of the tunic and the scarlet of the facings and braid were all of one dingy hue, attracted some attention among the gorgeous, and almost fantastic, costumes of the Russian staff and cavalry officers in the ante-room, through which he was quickly ushered into the presence of Tchernaieff.

The latter, who wore a short, brown shell-jacket, with a rolling collar laced with gold, and crimson overalls, was smoking a huge pipe and seated at a table littered with papers and printed journals, from which he started up as Cecil entered, and, drawing himself up to the full height of his short pudgy figure, while all his short, stubbly hair seemed to bristle, and his

wiry moustaches to stick out like those of a cat, he eyed him with considerable sternness, indignation, and surprise, mingled in a face that was never at any time a very handsome one.

Count Palenka, who was writing at the table, laid down his pen and eyed Cecil with cold hauteur, even hostility, and did not accord him the vestige of a recognition.

'What on earth can be in the wind now?' thought the latter, as his late bright hopes vanished into thin smoke. Mechanically he took the despatches from his sabretache, and said respectfully:

'I have the honour to deliver to your excellency these documents, entrusted to me by his Majesty the King.'

'His Majesty the King does not owe you many thanks for the haste you have made!' replied Tchernaieff, as he somewhat rudely snatched the papers from Cecil's hand, while his eyes literally glared at him.

'I do not understand this bearing of yours, general,' said he, haughtily.

'You may understand, however, Herr Lieutenant, that you loitered for many days idly at Palenka.'

'A dislocated arm—dislocated when fording the Morava—detained me there.'

'A likely story, truly,' said Tchernaieff, with growing indignation; 'why ford a river that has bridges, and why the devil ford it at all, before coming to the town of Tjuprija?'

'I lost the direct road and fell into the river in the night. The family of the Count——'

'Knew not that they were harbouring a traitor,' said Palenka, grimly.

'A traitor, Herr Count!' exclaimed Cecil.

'I have said it; so don't repeat my words.'

'There must be some strange misconception in all this,' replied Cecil, more bewildered than indignant, perhaps; 'the way was beset——'

'By Captain Mattei Guebhard,' interrupted Tchernaieff.

'You know it!'

'From his own lips. He is now in camp, and very properly and duly reported to me that he had done so; but that you escaped him, he knows not how, after killing one of his men, and causing, by misadventure, the death of another.'

Cecil was more and more bewildered by the strange candour of Guebhard in acknowledging the outrageous conduct of which he had been guilty; but the injurious treatment now so unexpectedly accorded him, after all he had undergone, filled him with just anger and indignation.

'Who dares to accuse me of wrong, or even of error?' he demanded.

'That you will discover in time.'

'Of what am I accused?' he continued.

'That also you will learn in time; and in time you may see the mines of Siberia, if you escape death! Meanwhile you will withdraw, and remain under close arrest. Count Palenka, take his sword.'

'The officer of the nearest guard can do that. Your excellency must hold me ex-

cused,' was the haughty and contemptuous reply of Palenka; and a few minutes afterwards Cecil found himself disarmed and a prisoner under close arrest, with special sentries guarding the door of the house, in an apartment of which he was left to his own bitter and confused thoughts.

That he was the victim of some strange and malevolent report made by Guebhard to the general and Count Palenka, he could not doubt; but of what nature could that slander be? Palenka had called him a 'traitor.' He could only be so to King Milano Obrenovitch, and he felt certain that no act of his own could draw such an epithet upon him, so to Guebhard now did the whole tide of his fury turn.

CHAPTER VI.

A FATAL PROOF FOUND.

FOOD and wine were placed before him; he recoiled from the former, but drank the latter like one who had been long athirst.

After all he had undergone, and all he had done, to preserve and deliver in safety these unlucky despatches, this, then, was the grim and degrading welcome that awaited him in the camp of the allied Servian and Russian armies?

What did it all mean? Some dreadful mistake, or a false and malicious accusation, which time must soon unravel. Meanwhile, how difficult it was to be patient or

calm under the circumstances; and he asked himself again and again, would Fortune never be tired of persecuting him?

Would he ever forget, he had thought, that *mauvais quart d'heure* in the place that so nearly became his grave? and now he was in peril as great again.

'A traitor,' had been the epithet applied by Count Palenka towards him. In what way could he ever be so? Was he to be made the victim—the scapegoat of some dark political game, between the Servian prince he served, and the general of the Russian army? 'You may see Siberia yet, if you escape death,' had been the menace of the latter, who actually owed his life at his—Cecil's—hands. He recalled the words, and knowing all of which these men were capable, and all they had the power to do, with all his natural courage, could not but feel appalled.

The room to which he had been consigned was on the upper floor of a house in the little town of Deligrad. It had little

other furniture than a wooden divan, that ran round it, and whereon were spread the bear and wolf skins on which he could seat himself, or repose at night.

Its windows were little more than narrow slits, and through them he could see the camp, spreading over the low-lying eminences which bound, on the east, the Valley of the Morava—the long streets of tents and huts, and little *tentes-d'abri*, the smoke of the fires at which the soldiers cooked their food; and the Servian tricolour flying on a huge earthen redoubt, formed on the summit of the most commanding height, and armed with heavy guns, pointed grimly towards the point from which the Turks might be expected to approach.

Amid these streets of tents, drums were beaten and bugles sounded all day long; orderlies spurred their horses to and fro, and Servian peasants drove waggons drawn by white bullocks, or led long lines of laden ponies, and itinerant sutlers and vendors of grapes and apples, sardines, tomatoes and tobacco, etc., went incessantly about, to-

gether with itinerant fiddlers and bagpipers.

Beyond all this, he could see the road winding away to Belgrade, near two long, low, whitewashed edifices, the abodes of suffering and death. On each a white flag with a red cross was displayed to indicate that they were hospitals, on which no shot or shell must fall, even if the infidels succeeded in storming the heights of Djunis, which overhang the other side of the Morava.

Daily Cecil watched all this from his windows, till his soul sickened at it all and of inaction, after the fierce excitement of recent events; but after a week had elapsed, the clash of arms, as the two sentinels at the door accorded a salute to some visitors, followed by the clatter of spurs and steel scabbards on the wooden staircase of the house, preceded the entrance into Cecil's room of an officer in the uniform of the Servian staff, the provost-marshal and a gentleman in civilian costume, who announced himself as the deputy minister

of police from Belgrade, and who was attended by a subordinate in a kind of uniform.

'Police?' replied Cecil, in an inquiring tone; 'it is, then, some civil—error that I am accused of?'

'No error at all, Herr Lieutenant; but of a crime against the State,' replied the civilian—a black-bearded man, with the ribbon of the Takova cross at his lapelle—in a somewhat gruff manner. 'Information has been lodged with the authorities that you have, or have borne about you, papers of a treasonable nature.'

'Lodged, by whom?'

'Captain Mattei Guebhard.'

Cecil laughed, but angrily, nevertheless.

'Herr Lieutenant,' said the provost-marshal, a grim-looking old sabreur, 'you may find this a hanging, and not a laughing, matter!'

'Thus,' continued the deputy minister of police, 'we have orders to examine your person for secret papers, if, by the delay

foolishly accorded to you, they have not been destroyed.'

'Papers—what papers?'

'That, as yet, can only be known to yourself.'

On this his attendant made a pace towards Cecil, who haughtily motioned him by his hand to pause, ere he laid a hand upon him.

'You delivered the despatches of General Tchernaieff to the King at Belgrade?' resumed the police official.

'To the King—yes.'

'Don't repeat my words, please!'

'Mein Herr?'

'I say, don't repeat my words!' exclaimed the other, who manifested rather a disposition to bully. 'You tarried unnecessarily at the castle of Palenka?'

'I met with an accident, of which the general is, I presume, fully aware, though the count seems somewhat dissatisfied,' said Cecil, in whom this questioning excited surprise and indignation, rather than alarm.

'There you met Captain Guebhard?'

'To my sorrow, and no small disgust, I did.'

'And though unable, as you averred, to proceed, you refused to give him the documents; but conveyed them in a contrary direction from the camp, with what purpose is best known to yourself; and but for the circumstance of your meeting an escort of Servian troops, the general would never have received them at all?'

'This statement is false in its tenor,' replied Cecil, haughtily; 'and I am utterly in the dark as to your inferences.'

'Ah—indeed! Permit me to examine your sabretache.'

'It is empty.'

'We shall see,' replied the official, as he unbuckled the accoutrement so named, and which was suspended by three slings from the waistbelt. 'What have we here?' he added, as he drew from an inner pocket, which Cecil never knew it possessed, a small parchment document, and uttered a genuine cry of astonishment; 'here is

enough to hang a battalion!' he added. 'Herr Lieutenant, here we find you in open communication with the Pretender, Kara Georgevitch!'

'Who the deuce is he?' asked Cecil, with equally genuine surprise.

'Do not pretend ignorance, and thus add to the crime for which you will be so severely punished, that I am actually sorry for you,' replied the deputy minister of police, regarding Cecil with great sternness nevertheless. 'Here is your commission as colonel—bearing your own name—to raise a regiment of Montenegrin deserters, for the service of Kara Georgevitch—the exile—the outlaw—the Pretender to the Servian throne, to whom, no doubt, you intended to convey alike the King's despatches and the general's plan of the campaign!'

'Impossible—you are under some delusion,' said Cecil, with anger now.

'I need scarcely ask you to look upon what you know already exists,' replied the other, with some indignation, and then

holding the document before the eyes of Cecil, who saw plainly and undoubtedly that it was all he stated it to be, and his name written there as 'Cecil Falconer,' and that, among other signatures, that of Kara Georgevitch was appended to it.

So completely was he bewildered by this strange circumstance, that he permitted the document to be taken away before he had further examined it; and while a drawn sword was placed against his heart, the pockets of his uniform, and even the lining thereof, were roughly examined for other treasonable papers, after which his visitors retired, and he was left—astounded—to his own reflections.

He was the victim of a deep-laid scheme by Guebhard. He saw it all, and in his suppressed passion could scarcely breathe—yes, he saw it all now; but how to prove it? Failing to abstract or obtain by fair means the despatches at Palenka, for the information of this Kara Georgevitch, with whom the fact of having this—probably blank—commission proved him to

be in communication—he had beset the way, and finding that Cecil baffled him, had now brought this false accusation against him.

He remembered the warning of Margarita, and that he had detected Guebhard meddling with his sabretache. Could he doubt, now, that he had intended to abstract the despatches on one hand, while concealing in it this perilous and already prepared document on the other?

It was not until a day or two more had elapsed that Cecil understood his peril fully or what the involvement meant, and that there were two claimants to the Servian throne—Milano Obrenovitch the successful one, now reigning, and Kara Georgevitch, a pretender. It was a position exactly the same as if some one in Scotland, in the days of 'the Forty-Five,' had been found with a commission to raise a regiment of Highlanders for 'King James VIII.;' and thus Cecil found himself, as yet, in a predicament of no ordinary magnitude, in which those for the prosecu-

tion would have it all their own way, and the defence, conducted by himself, must seem weak indeed.

Again and again, Pelham, Stanley, and one or two other kind-hearted Englishmen, who, in search of a 'new sensation,' were taking a turn of service against the Turks, endeavoured to visit him, and to take some measures for his safety; but all were bluntly refused access to the prison in which he lay, for so closely was the house guarded, that it became a prison in reality now.

He lost heart—his spirits began to sink under the rigid confinement to which he was subject, and his doubt and anxiety as to the future issue of the whole affair. He had about him a confused and dazed feeling, such as he had not possessed since he had been in the castle of Edinburgh, and the time of the fatal ball; and as the hours passed by him in solitude, and the detested details of his room—the pattern of the paper on its walls, the divan that

bordered them, the skins that lay thereon, the cracks in the ceiling and the bare planking of the floor—seemed to become photographed on his brain, and the senseless jingle of silly airs, the words of absurd rhymes, recurred to him again and again with that provoking but persistent reiteration so common to all—at least to many—when their minds are tortured by doubt or calamity.

Seated there in that prison-room, hearing the sounds of the adjacent camp by day, and by night only the measured tread of the Russian sentinels without, as they trod silently and monotonously to and fro on their posts, Cecil—looking back through the receding vista of the past, and the latter and most bitter portion of his career in which Mary Montgomerie bore a part, was often on the point of asking himself whether it was not a dream rather than a reality, that brief and happy reminiscence of their love; and whether it did not pertain to a life in past ages and under

some different phase of existence. In short, his thoughts, under the high-pressure put upon him, became rather wild and incoherent at times.

CHAPTER VII.

CECIL'S VISITOR.

FROM the monotony of his moody and irritating reflections he was roused one day by the entrance of a visitor, and he started on finding himself face to face with Margarita Palenka, who had come to the camp on horseback, escorted by old Theodore, the veteran of Sadowa. Her eyes were full of unshed tears, as she gave Cecil her hand, and it was impossible for him to behold this beautiful girls' sympathy unmoved.

'How can I ever thank you,' said he, 'for all this deep and kindly interest in me—almost a stranger?'

'I fear the worst, from what my brother says,' she replied in a low and husky voice.

'The worst—death?'

'Better that than—Siberia!'

'So say I,' was Cecil's grim response; and then he added hotly: 'I am a British subject; how dare they menace me with such a fate?'

'A British subject once—a Servian soldier now,' said she, gravely.

Cecil thought of the old Cameronians, and his heart seemed to swell painfully, while he eyed with some contempt the brown sleeve of his Servian tunic.

Margarita had come to Deligrad, we have said, on horseback; thus a brown riding-habit—almost claret-coloured in tint, out of compliment to the Servian uniform, and like it faced with scarlet and laced with gold—set off her magnificent bust and figure generally. A smart hat encircled by a white ostrich feather, with white riding gauntlets, made up a costume that was altogether very effective, and became

the brilliant and striking character of her beauty.

At her left breast she wore the bright ribbon of St. Catherine of Russia, procured for her by Tchernaieff, and given to ladies of rank alone.

'Think not ill of me for this visit,' said she after a pause, and when he led her to a seat on the divan; 'I have come to comfort you, when none other dare attempt it—to save you if I can, and none other dare attempt that either, or is perhaps inclined to do so.'

She felt the peculiarity, the delicacy of her position; and Cecil felt it too, with a rush of gratitude in his heart—all the greater, no doubt, that she was so beautiful in person, and winning in manner.

Intensely interested as she had found herself to be in the fortunes and safety of a young stranger; knowing the wiles and the vengeance of which he was assuredly the victim, and all that he had to apprehend in the present and in the future, sleep had almost deserted the eyes of Margarita

for some nights past, and thus their lids were inflamed and her face looked wan. For hours, without retiring to bed, she had been wont to sit musing by the windows of her room, watching the stars as they shone above the dark woods of Palenka, and listening to the distant roar of the Morava, till inaction became torture, and she made up her mind to ride to Deligrad, to discover the truth of all the alarming stories that had reached her and the old countess, and also what she could do to serve—if possible to save him.

Hence her most unexpected visit to Cecil.

'When you warned me to beware of Mattei Guebhard,' said he, 'I could little imagine, or anticipate, all he can be capable of.'

'And I little thought, when we parted at Palenka, to see you again,' said she, with something pathetic in her voice; 'and less than all, under such circumstances as the present.'

'But you do not believe—you cannot believe——'

'About the commission? No—of course not: the idea of your being colonel of a regiment of such wretches as the Black Mountaineers is too absurd! Savages whose tastes for strong waters, the property of their neighbours, and the noses, ears, and even the skulls of their enemies, are proverbial,' she added with a shudder. 'Besides, I understand that you never even heard of Kara Georgevitch?'

'Never before. I knew not there was such a person in existence.'

'How singular! I have met him often at Vienna; danced with him at the palace on the west side of Innerstadt, and know that he — admired me very much,' she added, with a little smile.

'His commission had my name in it, my accusers assert.'

'I do not yet understand the mystery of that—though how it came into your possession is plain enough to me.'

'And to be accused of killing a couple of Montenegrins——'

'Who would have killed you if they

could! The concealed paper was a *dernier ressort*, in case you escaped them. Oh, it is all so like the subtle and elaborate villany of Mattei!'

'And how absurd is the accusation that I meant to carry away the King's despatches for the service of Kara Georgevitch or the Turks, when I risked life to defend them!'

'Time will unravel all this—meantime, I shall watch over you, if I can,' said she, almost tenderly, holding out her hand to him ungloved, with a pretty yet imperious air, as if to show its whiteness and beauty, for she was a coquette to the tips of her fingers.

He touched it very lightly, but instead of retaining it, as she doubtless expected, drew back—as if to avoid temptation, she seemed to think, for she said haughtily:

'You forget yourself, sir, or me!'

'Would that I could do so!' said Cecil.

The gentleness of his tone, the sadness and bewilderment of his air, touched her; she took his hand deliberately in both hers,

and kissing him on the forehead with warm and throbbing lips, said:

'My brother's preserver and my brother's friend! I repeat that I have come to serve you and save you, if I may—to see you and comfort you at least, in a land where you are so utterly friendless.'

Her voice broke a little.

'By whose permission did you reach me?' asked Cecil hastily, and apparently oblivious of her emotion.

'That of Tchernaieff—he could not refuse me.'

'Who that looked upon your face could refuse you anything!' he exclaimed, more in a spirit of gallantry than anything else.

'I detest compliments; so seek not to flatter me.'

'Nay, flattery exists not in paying praise due to beauty or merit, but in praise misplaced.'

After a pause, Cecil said with a smile:

'Surely you never, at any time, loved this man Mattei Guebhard?'

'I never did so,' said she, emphatically;

'but, I once said before, I could not help him loving me. I have never loved anyone; and moreover I shall never—marry!'

Now Cecil had known and seen enough of the world to be aware that when a handsome young woman declares her intention of never marrying, it becomes one of the broadest hints a man can receive; and, under all the circumstances, he heard her now with a perplexity that bordered on irritation.

At such a time cold reason might suggest that Mary Montgomerie, and his country too, were lost to him for ever! In Servia was his new home; Margarita was beautiful, anxious to serve him and to win his gratitude—too evidently his love, if she could. Just rage at Guebhard invited him to meet her half-way; but the image of Mary came before Cecil, and he thought:

'Montrose was right in his song—"Love one, and love no more!"'

He was perfectly conscious that some time or other, at Palenka, he *had* spoken of love to Margarita; but was then refer-

ring to his love of Mary Montgomerie; while she had believed that he was in some curious way pleading his own cause with herself.

There was even now a struggle going on in the heart of Margarita, between her mind and her affections; and though eventually it seemed as if the latter would conquer, some sense of propriety, of what society and training inculcated, and the moral force of her own spirit, did battle against them; and then, moreover, she was not without some dread of her brother the Count of Palenka.

Despite all this, and her recent coquettish announcement that she could never love, and would never marry any man, Cecil found her coming to the point with him and taking the initiative, piqued perhaps that he was the only man she had never yet subdued; and so, before he knew very well how it had all come to pass, or by what she had prefaced it, he was startled by her saying in her most dulcet Servian :

'So you think, dear Cecil, I could make your life a happy one?'

She asked this softly, yet a little imperiously, while flicking the skirt of her riding-habit impatiently with her switch, and with downcast looks, as Cecil paused in perplexity, thinking, 'What had he said to draw this forth?'

'Surely I am not so uncivilised; I don't ever paint and powder, like all the English girls I saw at Vienna!' she added.

'But,' said poor Cecil, who thought he had perils enough to encounter, without thus being 'run to earth,' and having this perplexity added to them, by an impulsive girl, who probably had something Hungarian and Italian in her blood, inherited from the old heyduc; 'but they don't all wear paint and powder—and one girl I knew at home certainly did not do so.'

This was, to say the least of it, an unfortunate speech.

'One,' said Margarita, with a flash in her eyes; 'who was she?'

'One of whom you remind me—at times,' he replied, thinking to compliment her by saying that which was simply untrue.

'*Who* was she—who *is* she—one you cared for?'

'Not as I care for you,' replied Cecil unwisely, yet truthfully enough; 'but long ago—ah, how long ago it seems—she passed out of my life, and I out of hers.'

'She is dead, then?'

'Yes—to me.'

'To the world, you mean—so she is in a convent, then?' said Margarita, readily adopting the idea suggested by herself.

'You have no need to be jealous of her,' said Cecil.

'Nor am I,' replied Margarita proudly, and still switching her riding-skirt.

'Was she like me, as you say?'

'Handsome, with perfect features—*mignonne* face, and——'

'Enough—let us talk of ourselves now,' said Margarita softly, and then Cecil found himself adopted and placed—he feared—on the footing of an accepted

lover, without having attempted to play the character, in any way.

What might be the result, if this too evident regard for him turned to hatred under his coolness? He remembered the well-known couplet in Congreve's 'Mourning Bride,' and became filled with positive apprehension, if it be true that there is 'no fury like a woman scorned.'

Platonism was evidently a *rôle* she did not understand; and when any suspicion of his doubts or hesitation occurred to her, her full proud lips curled, her dark eyes flashed, and a flush crossed her cheek. But how was he to indulge in love-making—and still more in affecting such, environed by perils as he was then.

It was but too evident that Margarita, like most coquettes, had fallen a victim to herself at last, and was actually pining for a man who had never spoken to her more than words of the merest friendship and thanks; and but for the memory of Mary, and a sentiment of chivalry that mingled with his love for her, Cecil, under

all the circumstances of his position, might have yielded to the temptation that beset him, and at all hazards have become the lover of this Servian girl, whose wild impulses came to her with the mixed blood of more than one fiery race; and who, hence, could not be judged of by the same standard as an English girl of the same position.

At last she rose to retire.

'I cannot conceal from you, that, from all I hear, your peril is very great,' said she, nervously attempting to button her riding gauntlets, a task which Cecil hastened to perform for her.

'I shall demand a court-martial!' he exclaimed.

'Palenka tells me that such will not be accorded to you.'

'What then?'

'By the fiat of the King, through the minister of police, you may be—will be—I cannot speak it,' she continued in a broken voice, as her tears fell fast, and her head drooped for a moment on his shoulder;

'rather let me aid you to escape, and fly this place for ever. Have you money?'

'None.'

'That shall be my care—and horses too, by which to reach the frontier of Bulgaria, about fifty miles from this, where you will be comparatively safe. But how to get you out of this place—and how to elude these Russian sentinels at the door, are the difficulties that appal and bewilder me!'

'Margarita, the idea of flight is most repugnant to me—it looks so like timidity and confession of guilt.'

'They are determined to deem you guilty, I fear, under any circumstances. You have but yourself to consider, and—me.'

'But without a guide——'

'Fear not for that—I shall provide you with a guide too,' she replied with a bright and tender smile; and so ended this strange interview, which, for a little time at least, had served to lure him from his troubles, yet had added to his perplexity; for he felt that if Mar-

garita saved him from impending peril—and that she would do so at all hazard he never doubted—that circumstance would load him with a debt of gratitude which the devotion of his future life could—in her estimation—alone repay!

CHAPTER VIII.

BAFFLED!

THERE could be no doubt that Cecil had interested Margarita tenderly and deeply. She had studied him closely; she was acute, and had gathered, from much he had mentioned incidentally at Palenka, that he had been unfortunate already in life, young though he was, and that he had 'a history,' as Mary Montgomerie and Annabelle Erroll had surmised before.

She guessed that his boyhood and youth had not been quite happy, and this, more from his reserve concerning them than from confessions made. She gathered, too,

that over his early years no father's love or protection had been thrown; that he had no brother or sister, but had possessed a mother on whose memory he doted, and at the mention of whose name she saw the expression of his eyes soften, and heard at times his voice grow tremulous; and she loved him all the more for the little halo of mystery that seemed to surround him.

And she had remarked, with pain, how the rich gloss had left his dark brown hair, and that there were haggard lines about his eyes and mouth; and that much of the soldierly *débonnaire* frankness and manner in his bearing was gone now.

Empowered by the possession of Tchernaieff's signed permission 'for the bearer to visit the prisoner,' and encouraged by the absence of her brother Palenka at the headquarters of General Dochtouroff, she came again at noon to make final arrangements for his escape and flight.

'But how to get out of Deligrad?' said he, after their first greetings were over;

and here we may mention that, literally, *grad* means a fortress in that part of the world.

'That will be my task,' replied Margarita.

'But to fly, like a coward, or a criminal!'

'I wish you could fly like a bird,' said she, playfully. 'Heed not scruples—what scruples have these people with you? There is no shame in such a flight. Believe me, Cecil, I do not speak unadvisedly. If you would be a living man—at the least an unfettered prisoner, being taken you know not whither,' she continued, in a voice that suddenly broke, 'you must be out of Deligrad to-morrow night. Let us not waste time. Listen, and obey me; I will find the occasion, the means, the guide, a sure means of escape, if you will but avail yourself of them.'

Did she mean to accompany him in his flight? He half feared so, not knowing how far the wild impulses of this fair continental might carry her; but he was not left long in doubt.

'Once clear of Deligrad and the advanced posts,' said she, 'you will proceed by Banga and Nissa, but that town must be avoided, as it is fortified with ramparts, palisades, and closely-watched gates; then by Mustapha-pacha or Glana; but that being a fortress, must be avoided too; and once beyond Stolo, oh, Cecil, we shall be safe!'

'*We?*'

'I must accompany you to ensure your safety; it is only some fifty miles; and if my share in your flight is discovered, as it is sure to be, what will be my fate? Then Bulgaria or cold Britain must be my abiding-place, after all.'

'*Nous verrons,*' was the dubious response of Cecil, as he took her hand in his, and her eyes drooped. 'And your plan?' he asked, with an ill-repressed smile.

'Ottilie—you remember Ottilie; she is a tall girl; and will come hither about dusk, armed with a pass, and wearing the cap and capote of a Russian officer. Clad in this costume, you take her place and

pass out; she will give you the parole, when I get it.'

'Leaving her here?'

'Yes.'

'And what will be her punishment?'

'Palenka will save her, I have not the slightest doubt.'

'Could he not, then, save you? Is there no other plan?'

'Listen to me,' she continued, impetuously. 'To give each of the sentinels a cup of drugged vodka would be easy enough, and doubtless they would drink them to the last drop. I have seen such things done on the stage at the theatre in Vienna, and read of such things again and again in romances; but they would be discovered asleep on their post, ere you were clear of this—so the disguise is the most perfect plan, and the darkness will favour it.'

As they spoke their hands were fondly linked for a time—his, in a spirit of purest gratitude; hers, passionately—there was no concealing that!

'You will give the parole,' she continued, in a low voice, 'and pass on to the group of cottages lying yonder in the hollow on the right of the camp, and there old Theodore will be waiting with horses when the evening gun is fired. No more; you know all, and now I must be gone.'

'Farewell, Margarita; to me you are a protecting angel—yet, ere you go——' he bent down and kissed her, as her face fell on his neck.

'Regard me as a sister,' she faltered; and in a moment more he was alone, with a confused sense of not having exhibited sufficient gratitude or regard for one who was risking so much for him.

After she was gone the hours passed slowly, while Cecil remained sunk in thoughts that were far from being pleasant.

Times there were when he felt sullenly and doggedly resigned to the inevitable, whatever it might be—to await what fate had in store for him. His essay in a new country, a new service and field, for laudable ambition, had proved a miserable and

total failure, and life seemed to have no prize for him now that was worth consideration.

Other times there were when a fierce gust of impatience and indignation possessed him, and he paced his room like a caged lion—impatience of coercion and just indignation at the severe treatment to which he was subjected, the unjust suspicion under which he lay, and the dangers which menaced him at the hands of the ignorant, prejudiced, and uninquiring officials at whose mercy he found himself.

Thus he fell the more readily into Margarita's scheme of seeking safety in flight, and so ending all connection between himself and the Servian army.

'Death or Siberia—death or Siberia! What manner of death?' he would ask of himself; 'a soldier's, surely!'

He felt sometimes, in his over-tension of thought, that peculiar emotion which many must have experienced—as though he was not himself, but had two separate identities; and that the old self was far away

from that prison room, before the windows of which the two Russian sentinels seemed to tread for ever to and fro, with their bayonets glittering within arm's length of him.

Were misfortune and he to go for ever hand in hand? He deemed that already he had offered up hostages, bitterly, to evil destiny, when he was thrust out of his beloved regiment, when he lost Mary, and was cast, nameless, on the world; and lo! the hand of fate was on him again, and more heavily than ever.

And ever and anon a gust of rage at Guebhard shook his breast, with a longing for just vengeance upon him. Guebhard was evidently one of those strange and pernicious creatures who crop up at rare times in all phases of society, and have existed in all ages of mankind—one of a miserable band of men who, according to an essayist, resemble the lowest animals of creation, and are far more pitiless when their hate or hunger are raised. 'They are as crafty as they are cruel; they watch,

wait, and see whom they can destroy, and outrage every feeling dear to the majority of mankind; and to call such men brutes is to throw scorn upon creatures who may be considered superior to them in every way.'

Such a man was Mattei Guebhard!

Cecil could punish him, certainly, by carrying off Margarita, and taking her for ever beyond his reach; but how was he—Cecil—a fugitive in Bulgaria, without a ducat in his pocket, to subsist there, and with a beautiful girl on his hands, unless he offered his sword and his services to Osman Pasha, whose army was ere long to advance upon Plevna?

Anything—any risk—he thought, was better than utter inaction. The suspense of his position was intolerable; and it would be easier, he imagined, when the worst had come, whatever it was, when it was faced, and all was over for ever!

So the day passed slowly on towards evening; the sounds in the busy and crowded camp began to lessen and nearly

die away; sunset drew near, and the in-lying pickets were beginning to fall in with greatcoats and knapsacks, and Cecil looked from time to time towards the group of white walled cottages, shadowed by dark cypresses, in the hollow near the camp, where even now, perhaps, old Theodore awaited him with the horses, and his heart leaped when suddenly the evening-gun boomed from the earthen rampart on the summit of the position, and the Servian tricolour came fluttering down the staff as it was struck for the night.

Steps sounded on the wooden stairs, and a personage entered, clad in Russian uniform, ushered by the serjeant of the guard. The moment the latter withdrew, Ottilie, for it was she, divested herself of a false beard and moustache of grizzled hair, and it seemed strange to see suddenly the smooth and handsome face, the dark laughing eyes and pouting lips of the pretty Servian girl.

She wore the deep peak of a flat Russian forage-cap well down over her face,

which was also further hidden by the high fur-collar of a long regimental grey capote, which reached nearly to the ground, and in them she proceeded at once to invest Cecil, saying that Theodore awaited him at the appointed place.

Obedient to the will of her mistress, Ottilie, poor girl, seemed to have none of her own, and had no fear for herself save in disobeying the orders of Margarita.

Cecil, even now, lingered in adopting the costume she brought him—lingered with mingled repugnance and rage at having to adopt such a *rôle*. Then came an emotion of disgust at a service which forced such a *rôle* upon him, mingled with a longing for the freedom proffered, and so close at hand. Already, in fancy, he seemed to be in the open air—the free breezy atmosphere, at liberty, and in the saddle, galloping on and on towards the Bulgarian frontier; already he seemed to feel the horse under him; to be inhaling the perfume of night, the fragrance of the pine-forests by the broad-flowing Morava;

but then he thought of the girl whom he was to leave in his place, and his heart died within him!

She covered her face with her hands, and, while she wept bitterly, exclaimed, in broken accents:

'Oh, Herr Lieutenant, I have destroyed you! I have forgotten the pass-word!'

'Perhaps it is as well,' said he, with stern composure; 'but don't weep, my brave girl, and, hush! cloak yourself again, some one is coming.'

Steps, voices, and lights were all on the creaking stairs without, and the guard on the house were now under arms in front of it. Who were coming? What had caused an alarm? Had the plot of Margarita been discovered.

'Quick, disguise yourself and begone—you have not a moment to lose,' exclaimed Cecil, compelling Ottilie to resume her costume and prepare to withdraw; and it seemed to him that while life lasted, if for thirty years, as it might do now only for thirty minutes, he would never forget the

memory of those voices and steps on the staircase, or the glare of light that streamed under the door across the bare floor of his room.

The idea of resistance, mad and desperate, of shooting down the first man who entered (for Ottilie had given him pistols), occurred to Cecil; but only to be relinquished, as he thought of the poor girl whom he might involve in ruin if he shed blood; and, throwing the weapons to the other end of the apartment, he drew himself proudly up to await whatever fate had in store for him now; and he did not doubt that it was terribly close and finally arranged, when, among the group who entered, he recognised his former grim visitors, the deputy minister of police, and the provost-marshal of the camp!

CHAPTER IX.

CROSS PURPOSES.

'GOOD-MORNING, Fotheringhame,' said Sir Piers, as his guest entered the breakfast-room betimes, in shooting-costume, and ready for the preserves; 'I trust that Eaglescraig air and Eaglescraig claret and whisky brought you pleasant dreams.'

'There are other and better adjuncts here to suggest pleasant dreams,' replied Fotheringhame, as his eye rested for a moment on the two young ladies, and he gave his hand to Mrs. Garth, after which an animated discussion about sport ensued between him and the general, while

Mary and Annabelle idled over their letters.

Leslie Fotheringhame was one of those kind of men of whom little is usually seen when staying in a country house; thus, short though his visit was to be, and important the object which brought it about, all the day subsequent to his arrival he was beating the covers, and after the partridges, with old Sandy Swanshot the keeper.

Was Annabelle disappointed in this? we are forced to admit that she was piqued by it, however.

Like many social monomaniacs, Mrs. Garth considered herself an able tactician, and thought to set matters right between these sundered twain; but in this instance she failed signally, especially with Annabelle; there seemed something mysterious in the quarrel, their relation to each other, and their mutual sentiments, which the old lady could not fathom.

Annabelle was very bitter on the subject.

'His presence here is an insult to me, Mary,' said she, after watching him cross the lawn, and disappear with the keeper and the dogs; 'and every time his eyes meet mine, they seem to be examining me, as if to learn how I bear his defection.'

'If I can read eyes aright, they wear a very different expression, Annabelle,' said Mary; 'but his presence here with you is indeed a singular coincidence.'

'After what happened in Perthshire, Mary, I made myself too cheap in Edinburgh, when we met again; and truth to tell you, darling, though I cannot hate—but love him still,' she continued, with her eyes flashing through unshed tears; 'I must hate myself for doing so—and despise myself for my infatuation. That my regard should be too lightly, too easily won, and re-won, by one who valued it not! But, if his majesty thinks he has but to throw the handkerchief, he is mightily mistaken,' she added haughtily.

'To me it seemed as if his eyes wore

almost an imploring look as he bade his adieu to you and left the breakfast table,' urged Mary, in her gentle manner; but though the idea was pleasant and soothing to Annabelle's angry pride, she replied that she felt only astonishment and indignation at his *hardiesse* in looking at, or addressing her at all.

'Am I to be a fool like the fair Elaine, who wasted all her life in caring for one man? But then there are no Sir Launcelots of the Lake now.'

Yet Annabelle, while sedulously schooling her heart to be indifferent, felt to the full, as far as Leslie Fotheringhame was concerned, how, mind and manner apart, 'one human being is felt to be more attractive for mere bodily reasons than all the rest of the world besides.'

Though a little provoked that he had gone forth to shoot, and waste, as she deemed it, a precious day in the coverts, Mary was grateful to Fotheringhame for the object which brought him to Eaglescraig—his interest in Cecil Falconer—or

Montgomerie, as she had taught herself to call him now.

In her mind he was every way associated with the days when life became to her an Eden—when loverlike she discovered that secresy and silence were sweet to cultivate; when the garden, the woods and fields, the moon, the stars, the sky, had all new charms, beauty, and brightness they had never possessed before, and her intercourse with Cecil became a system of emblems, metaphors, parables, whispers, and pressures of the hand.

How far away that delicious period of her life seemed now; and he—where was he? In a land to her less than half known, wholly barbarous, and where he was hourly menaced by a violent death.

'How large your ring seems for you now!' said Annabelle, as she toyed with Mary's hand.

'How much smaller my finger has become since Cecil placed it there!' replied Mary, turning the diamond engagement hoop wistfully; 'I am so afraid of losing it, that

I wear mamma's wedding-ring as a guard—many have done that.'

Fotheringhame returned late from the coverts, and long after the keeper had brought in his bag.

'Did you lose your way?' asked Mary.

'No, Miss Montgomerie; but I lost a locket from my chain—a locket that I would not lose for any sum of money.'

'And you found it, I hope?'

'Yes—here it is—but after a long hunt among the gorse and brake.'

'Is it so valuable, then?'

'To me it is.'

'May I ask what it contains?' asked Mary, laughingly, as she saw it dangling from his watch-chain.

'Well—a lock of hair—and——'

'What more?' she continued, archly.

'If you insist on knowing, the likeness of my—future wife,' said he in a whisper, yet not so low but that it reached the ears of the startled Annabelle; and Mary was so shocked, so pained and full of pity for her, that she grew very pale indeed, and

questioned him no more, and he laughingly retired to dress for dinner.

'So—so,' thought Annabelle; 'the locket I gave him actually contains the portrait of a woman—doubtless, she of the hazel eyes!'

Fotheringhame felt that he loved, or had loved, this proud girl earnestly and deeply; and that she with equal earnestness and depth resented something on his part which had, perhaps, driven her to loving some one else; thus the new emotion of jealousy was infused in his mind, imparting a constraint to his manner, while Annabelle felt that she had been merely the plaything of his idle hours. Thus each shut up their real feelings; and to a greater extent than either knew, they were at cross purposes.

Annabelle thought that she had overheard and discovered enough to cure her even of regret, and to steel her heart and make her seem what she wished to be, studiedly calm and indifferent to all appearance; but this resolution was rather

severely tested when after dinner, instead of joining Sir Piers in the smoking-room, Fotheringhame came lounging deliberately out to the terrace before the house, where she was lingering alone, with a Shetland shawl thrown over her head, and when he joined her, and—as she thought with singular coolness and effrontery—made some commonplace remarks upon the warmth and beauty of the autumnal evening, to which she assented coldly and briefly.

'Chance has thrown us together again—a chance for which I had ceased to hope,' said he, in a low and earnest voice; 'and, Annabelle—if you will once more permit me to call you so—I would wish to talk with you calmly and dispassionately over that estrangement which has been a source of great bewilderment and the keenest sorrow to me.'

She was amazed at his hardihood; but said, quietly and gently, while keeping her face averted, as he continued to walk by her side:

'If you are disposed to take a philosophical view of what has certainly crushed my pride—if I ever had any—and sorely wounded my self-esteem—nay more, has caused, I am willing to own, a great pang to my heart—so am I, Captain Fotheringhame. Our acquaintance, to call it by its least name, has been a most unfortunate one; so, if we talk at all, perhaps we may find another subject.'

And she continued to look straight before her, with her face half averted, and thankful that she had a veil—at least the Shetland screen—to conceal the proud and passionate tears that welled up in her blue and handsome eyes.

Meanwhile Mary, remembering Fotheringhame's awkward revelation so recently, was watching the pair with more anxiety than hope or exultation, and was perhaps a little surprised to see them gradually quit the terrace and descend to the shrubbery walk in the garden below.

'When will our consultation about Cecil begin!' she thought, a little petulantly and

impatiently. 'If a separation from one we love, though short, is hard to bear, what must such as mine from Cecil be?'

He might die in that distant land—how dreadful to consider such a contingency!—and in dying, never know of the good fortune that awaited him at home, of who his family were, and the bright hope that now smiled upon his love for her!

Meanwhile those she had been watching were now in a sequestered walk.

'You have suffered, Annabelle,' said Fotheringhame, in an agitated voice, as he turned and confronted her; 'I can read it in your face.'

'If I have suffered, sir, it has been through you.'

'Oh, say not so,' he exclaimed in a prayerful way.

'Sir—your manner—your mode of conduct, bewilder me!' she exclaimed, as she was about to sweep away, when he strove to take her hand, but she withdrew it sharply and defiantly.

'Annabelle!' he said reproachfully.

'How dare you—how can you be so persistently cruel?' she cried haughtily, while cresting up her head. There were no tears in her eyes or voice now.

'Cruel, Annabelle?'

There was the old charm in his voice, and she could not resist it.

'Why was that letter—my last to you—returned to me unopened?'

'Because, Captain Fotheringhame, I thought it right to do so.'

She was gazing at him now steadily and defiantly.

'Had you read that letter it would have explained all.'

'Who the mysterious "*F. F.*" is, or was.'

'Yes,' said he sadly, with a peculiar inflection of voice.

'Enough of this,' said Annabelle, haughtily; 'I leave you and all your interests to the—the lady whose likeness is in your valued locket.'

'You do? If I have been guilty of aught, in your eyes, you will certainly forgive me when you look upon her face.'

'Your intended! permit me to pass, Captain Fotheringhame—surely I have been subjected to mockery and insult enough to satisfy even you!'

With tender and observant eyes, Leslie Fotheringhame was watching her soft features, and saw them all quiver over, as if with a sudden pang, and his heart was moved, for a lovely face was hers. With much of reverential tenderness he detached the locket from his chain, opened it, and then Annabelle beheld a likeness of herself—simply a finely coloured photo, forgotten by her, but evidently treasured by him.

Annabelle was startled on seeing this, but not disconcerted.

'And so, sir,' said she, 'while loving another woman, you have in mockery, and perhaps for the amusement of your mess-room friends, dared to carry my likeness about with you!'

She spoke firmly, and with difficulty restrained a passionate fit of tears—of wild weeping, in fact.

'I never loved another woman—or any

one but you, and you alone, Annabelle, as I can swear to you with truth,' said he, earnestly and tenderly.

'And who, then, was the woman whose initials were the same as your own, or nearly so, with whom you had mysterious meetings—correspondence, and all that appeared to be part and parcel of a deep and concerted intrigue? But it is beneath me now to inquire!' she added bitterly.

'Annabelle, the returned letter would have told you all—my sister.'

'Your sister!' repeated Annabelle, in a breathless voice, and with some incredulity of manner.

'My only sister Fanny—the runaway wife of a husband who is now in India, and to pay whose debts I sold my troop in the Lancers. You have surely heard of your cousin Fanny Fleming. She had no friend in the world but me. I thought to conceal her existence from you and others; but you have wrung the secret from me. A false wife—a helpless, hopeless creature; but her sorrows, her repentances and all

are ended now, and she is in her grave. God rest her!'

There was a silent pause, during which, he could see how the bosom of Annabelle heaved with every respiration.

'And this was all your mystery?' said she, looking up with her eyes full of tears, and her lips quivering.

'All! and more than enough. It was to me a source of great horror, shame, and sorrow, to find my beloved sister—one whom many women loved, and all men admired; whose breast was the mansion of goodness and purity once—she, my gentle and loving sister, the child of the same father, nurtured by the same mother! and could I forsake her because she was in adversity, in sorrow, and repentant, and from whom all else in the world turned?'

'Oh, Leslie!' she exclaimed, as she frankly placed both her hands in his, and he drew her towards him, saying tenderly:

'Annabelle, let me prove my faith to you—forgive me——'

'I have nothing to forgive.'

'Then let us forget the miserable past.'

She felt his breath upon her half-averted cheeks, and his low and earnest whisper in her little white ear; and then, while weeping heavily, she fell on his breast.

'My darling,' she said in a broken voice, 'if I had only known of this—how different all would have been—how much spared us! Why did you not tell me—your sister——'

'I was not aware how much appearances were against me; and with you, I became jealous of some imaginary person. I shrunk from the task at first, and you—you returned, unread, the letter which would have explained all. But you are glad now, dearest?'

'Glad! O Leslie, to any other than you, I might refrain from admitting that I have never—since the day we parted—ceased to love you; and have now learned to love you more than ever.'

'And I love you, Annabelle, with the passion that comes only once in a man's life-time!'

And so, for a time, it may be inferred that this pair were pretty oblivious of the absent Cecil in Servia, and his interests at home.

CHAPTER X.

THE TELEGRAM.

IN her joy and impulsiveness, Mary actually embraced Leslie Fotheringhame, and kissed him when she heard from Annabelle of the reconciliation, and explanation of all that seemed so unpleasant and mysterious.

'Had she not loved you—yes, loved you dearly—do you think she would have felt all this so much—so keenly and so bitterly!' said Mary to Fotheringhame.

And hearty were the congratulations of the general, who was pleased that Eagles-craig should be the scene of such an event, though love and lovers' quarrels were some-

what beyond his sympathies now; but he liked Fotheringhame, as a friend of the absent Cecil, and he had a strong regard for Annabelle, the only daughter of an old and valued Indian comrade; so the episode immediately brought to memory one of his inevitable 'up-country' reminiscences.

'Talking of lovers' quarrels,' said he, as they idled over the dessert; 'egad! I remember one which was not without some strange features. When we were in Lucknow, under Inglis—just about the time of the first outbreak of the mutiny—a pair of lovers met, who had quarrelled in some jealous pique at a ball in Chowringhee. Olive Vane was a pretty brunette, daughter of an old Sudder judge, and her Romeo was Bob Acharn — cousin of Acharn of Ours, a lieutenant of the Bengal Native Infantry. There was not a better fellow at pig-sticking, or shooting, in all India than Bob; and I remember that, at Jodpore, he watched and waited for days and nights to pot a man-eater that had made a whole village desolate.

'As people don't lose time in love affairs in India, it was fully arranged that —the quarrel made sweetly up—the lovers should be married on the 31st of May, though many there were who said that the time was not one for marrying or giving in marriage, for the rising of the Pandies at Meerut, some time before, had sent a thrill of terror through every European breast in India, and at Lucknow, as elsewhere, it was uncertain when the secret hate of the natives might burst into a flame.

'The bridal party gathered, and at the very moment the clergyman was asking the bride if she was ready, a musket-shot entered the room, and she fell, mortally wounded. It had entered her chest, and then ensued a scene which I cannot describe.

'A company of Acharn's regiment—the 71st Bengal Native Infantry—had been brought in from the Muchee Bawn for disaffection some days before. They refused all obedience, and in vain were the black silk colours they had borne at So-

braon displayed to them. It was deemed imprudent to coerce them; and the result was that on that eventful evening—the 31st of May, the *budmashes,* or armed mob of Lucknow, rose, six thousand strong, crossed the Goomtee in wild tumult by a ford—a dark mass amid which there were thousands of glittering steel-points, rushing to join the mutineers. From one of the latter came the shot that struck down Olive Vane. We turned the great guns of the Residency upon them, and, after an hour's heavy firing, the insurrection was suppressed for a time; but a time only.

'During the attack and repulse, poor little Olive Vane lay motionless on a sofa, with young Acharn bending over her, weeping like a boy, and striving to staunch the blood that welled from the terrible wound in her bosom—a wound which the doctors declared she could not survive above an hour. When she recovered consciousness and learned the truth, her courage never quailed, but she said:

'"Bob—dearest, kiss me once again.

rash, as patrols of Circassian and Egyptian horse have been seen between the Timok and the Morava !'

'We are now within ten miles of Palenka, and have seen nothing as yet to alarm us,' she replied.

Palenka was in a safe district ; but who could count on what might lie between ? Why should he not escort her so far, when he was free to do so, as his command was a roving one ? and Palenka lay on the west side of the Timok, and in the district he was to examine.

Her eyes sparkled and her colour heightened as he announced his intention ; and they rode slowly on together, he the while, with all the interest that he could not help feeling in her, wishing in his heart that she was safe in Belgrade, Vienna, or anywhere else than by his side.

She thanked him for the proffered escort.

'Say nothing of that,' said he ; 'I owe you so much more than I can ever repay.'

'You owe me a debt, I know; yet it might be best adjusted by our forgetting —as if we had never known—each other.'

'Margarita, who that has seen and known you will ever forget you?' he asked, with truth in his voice and eye.

'Many, I have no doubt.'

Her manner was somewhat bitter and weary, and from under her long dark eyelashes she looked at him, from time to time, with a kind of passionate pain.

'One fact I shall never forget, at least—that you saved me from great and deadly peril, by your acumen and superior intelligence.'

'By my suspicion of Guebhard and general knowledge of his character, and of what he is capable—say, rather.'

'And thus you rendered my flight from Deligrad unnecessary.'

'Yes,' she replied curtly.

On that point he said no more. She coloured for a moment at his reference to it, and then became pale again; but paleness was the normal condition of her face.

This brilliant woman loved him, and had not cared much to conceal that she did so.

What was he to say to her—what to tell—how to explain all? It was impossible for him to put in clear, cold words before her the mortifying fear that he could not—should not love her in return, because he was affianced—so hopelessly, as he supposed—to another.

Could he ask her to take back a heart he certainly had never sought? It was in every way a perplexing and grotesque situation.

'You have become very silent,' said she, in a tone of pique, while switching, and then checking her horse. 'Of what are you thinking?'

'That if some of those wild Circassians, of whom I have been told, were only to appear now——'

'Heaven forbid! why?'

'That I might empty a saddle or two, and risk in your service the life you saved, and thus make an atonement——'

'I want no such risk run; and what,'

she asked a little sharply, 'do you mean by atonement?'

'Only this, that you saved my life, Margarita, and may claim its whole future, if you will,' said he, while Mary's face came reproachfully to memory, for the speech was disloyalty to her, however gallantly meant to Margarita, whom the peculiarity of its tenor irritated rather than flattered.

'This is an idle speech, and I know its value. I thank you for your escort, but we shall part at Palenka, and as another day will see me on the road for Vienna, we shall never meet again; and you may become to me, what I shall never be to you—a dream, without pain perhaps.'

This was one of her many strange and passionate speeches, his general or vague replies to which always piqued her.

'Youth and pleasure are a dream,' said he.

'And life itself, say some.'

'But these metaphysicians do not tell us where or how we shall wake to find it so—unless in death.'

'Enough of a subject so gloomy and abstruse,' said she sharply, for Cecil's strange indifference galled and piqued her keenly.

Though a fashionably-bred woman, and as a girl accustomed to the best society in Vienna, in wild Servia she was certainly rather untrammelled by the bonds of conventionality. Her life from young girlhood had been full of gaiety, variety, vivid colour, and very rational pleasure. She had been the object of much adulation, admiration, and love, too; she had been amused or bored by all, but won by none till now, when Cecil, the wanderer, the soldier of fortune, with no inheritance but his sword, had won her regard without seeking it.

She was assured now—bitterly so—that he would never kneel to her as a lover; yet she was loth that he should ever free himself from the power of her fascinations, if she could make him feel it. Fain would she have won that heart which seemed so fresh and guileless, so unlike any she had

yet met—so unworn and prone to have good faith in all men.

There was a certain languor and then occasional fiery carelessness in Margarita that must have come to her with the blood of the old heyduc of Palenka, and his bride—some odalisque, perhaps, won by the edge of his sabre amid the plunder of a pasha's household, and hers was the disposition, the passion and the situation, that so often lead to blind and bitter hatred, ending in crime and sorrow.

She knew the power of her beauty over all men, and she knew also the claim for special gratitude over this loyal, dauntless, and grateful heart, and hoped that she knew how to use both; thus many a time she looked at him with her bright, languid eyes, the colour of which was often difficult to define, with an expression which seemed to say:

'I saved your life and honour—therefore you ought to belong to me, and to no one else!'

And Cecil found it impossible to deny,

even to himself, the knowledge and certainty that this woman, so dazzlingly fair that few women ever saw her without jealousy, and fewer men without admiration or passion, had been ready—and was now ready—to risk shame, suffering or danger, and fly with him, seeking obscurity and exile in Bulgaria or anywhere else.

'Was ever man more tempted!' thought he, as he saw — with satisfaction — the gilded vanes and cupolas of Palenka glittering in the sunshine above the green-wooded bank of the Morava, and he reined up his horse to bid her farewell.

'You will surely ride up to Palenka, and bid mamma adieu?' she said, her eyes dilating with reproach.

'To visit Palenka, or anywhere else, is inconsistent with my duty; and the count your brother viewed my sojourn there with unconcealed displeasure.'

'As you please,' said she, coldly. Then, after a pause, she added, 'We have resolved to leave Servia, mamma and I, for a time —my brother wishes us to do so.'

'I would fain see you once again,' said he, with an access of tenderness, suited, however, to the occasion; 'but it may not be. To-night I shall halt in the wood near Tjuprija, and to-morrow go back on the spur to Deligrad.'

'The wood near Tjuprija—that is close at hand; so if we who have been so strangely thrown together are parted to meet no more in the future, and you would care to see me once again—just once—at noon to-morrow be by the wayside chapel on the rocks above the ruin—the chapel of Lazar—and—' she paused, as a spasm of pain made her proud and beautiful face quiver, 'and I shall be there.'

'At noon, then, to-morrow,' said he, bending over her gauntleted hand and kissing it, after which she rode off at a quick pace, followed by her two attendants, while Cecil fell back and rejoined his troopers, who made all haste to put out and hide the pipes in which they had—in defiance of orders—been indulging during his recent preoccupation in front of them.

At the same time a man—the bearded peasant before-mentioned—who had been concealed among some laurel-bushes, and had overheard the parting, crept stealthily away, with an expression on his face that would have startled Cecil had he seen it.

'To what end, or to what useful or wise purpose, under all the circumstances, can this assignation be? and in such a lonely place?' he thought. 'But what could I say—how decline the last request of one to whom I owe so much?'

Yet he wished it all well over, and anticipated, with genuine British dismay, something of a painful scene.

The night was passed by his troopers peacefully in the solitude of the wood referred to, under the stars. Morning came in bright with ruddy sunshine, and after such a humble repast as soldiers prepare under such circumstances, Cecil ordered them to unbit and unsaddle their horses, groom them, and re-examine all their ammunition—not all at once, but by

fours at a time—and after patrolling the woods in the vicinity, and finding all quiet, he halted them again in the wood, and set forth to keep his appointment at the chapel, which was on a rocky steep about a mile from it.

He crossed the Morava by an ancient bridge, supposed to be the work of Roman hands, and began to ascend the steep and rocky bank that overhung it, till he overlooked the windings of the river and the woods that half-concealed them, and attained the summit of a species of pass in which stood the wayside chapel—merely a rough species of altar, whereon was painted a rude and half-defaced effigy, surmounted by a projecting pediment or roof of red tiles.

Masses of wild vines flourished in luxuriance all around it, with other creepers, and from amid these there peered grotesquely forth—with its metal halo sorely faded—the effigy, which was supposed to represent the Servian *Krall*, Lazar, who was taken prisoner in the last great battle on the

plains of Kossava (which ended in the subjugation of Servia), and whose relics, after his murder in the camp of the Sultan Amurath, have wrought so many miracles, according to the superstition of his country, and now lie in the monastery of Ravenitza, which he founded; but Cecil thought nothing of all this, and probably knew nothing about it, as he looked about him anxiously and in haste for Margarita.

It was past the time of noon now; but she was not there. A sheer cliff of vast height, the base of which could not be seen, descended on one side; on the other was the narrow walk by which he had mounted to the wayside chapel.

He heard no sound but the voices of the birds, and he looked in vain for her figure—her drapery floating between the stems of the trees.

Why had she failed to keep her tryst? a kind of keen disappointment occurred to him now; he looked at his watch again. Time was long past now, and he thought

of his troopers and the homeward march to Deligrad!

Then, as he looked about him, his eye fell on two objects that gave him a shock, a bracelet and a handkerchief. The former lay imbedded in the turf, as if trod upon; the other fluttered on the stem of a wild vine.

He took up the former, a Turkish rose-pearl bracelet, which he remembered to have seen Margarita wear; so she must have come to the meeting-place and lost it. But why had she come and gone so soon?

The handkerchief, a white silk one, he examined, and on a corner thereof saw the name of 'Mattei Guebhard.'

Guebhard—then he too had been there; had in some way anticipated him! And now he saw that all the turf about the narrow path bore the indentations of feet, as if a struggle had taken place, and a great horror of—he knew not what—fell upon the heart of Cecil.

He thought of the Circassian and

Egyptian patrols, who were said to be scouting between the Morava and the Timok, but he thought not of the peasant who had dogged his party yesterday.

Had Guebhard succeeded in carrying her off—in abducting her beyond the Turkish lines? If so, in these days of Bulgarian atrocities, Cecil could but fear the worst, and his heart died within him as he returned, slowly and reluctantly, and with many a backward glance, to the road, where his troopers awaited him.

There was no time given him for inquiry, no time for further delay, and at a rapid trot the homeward march began.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WAYSIDE CHAPEL.

ON the morning of the same day, Margarita was surprised to receive a note, purporting to be from Cecil, whose handwriting she had never seen, requesting her to be at the wayside chapel of Krall Lazar two hours before noon, as the exigencies of the service required his presence elsewhere at the time formerly appointed.

This note had been give to Theodore by a man attired like a peasant, who promptly disappeared.

'Sooner than noon!' thought Margarita; 'perhaps he is impatient to see me. He

does love me—he must love me. But perhaps some dread of Palenka fetters his tongue; or can it be—but let me not think *that!*'

Never had Ottilie found her mistress more difficult to please in the mode of dressing her beautiful hair, than on the morning of this day, in the selection of a costume and the choice of colours; but at last she was attired to her own satisfaction, and when the time came, left Palenka by a garden-gate, and took the path that led to the wayside chapel, or altar, for, though named the former, it had rather the character of being the latter only.

Like Cecil, she, with all her hopes and wishes, had more than once questioned herself as to the end or utility of this meeting which it had been—she felt it—so unwomanly in her to invite.

She could not yet bear the idea that he should pass out of her life, or he out of hers. She dreaded an unknown rival, as she had never been baffled before; and over that rival, if such existed, she hoped

in the end to triumph by the power of her beauty and fascination of manner, and to win him, without pity, to herself; and, full of such thoughts, she trod lightly the steep and winding way that led to the shrine of Krall Lazar, and softly sang to herself the little Servian song of 'The Wishes,' which elsewhere she had sung to Cecil.

The morning was a glorious one, and in the poetry of her nature Margarita felt all the softening and exhilarating influences of it. The heavy fragrance of the great fir forest, on which the night-dew lingered, loaded the air, and the rays of the sun fell aslant them here and there, through the flat and fan-like boughs, from which the great, over-ripe cones, brown and full of seed, were dropping ever and anon.

A sea of pines, dark-green and sombre, seemed to spread in spiky conical peaks up the steep mountain-slopes, as she proceeded by the narrow pathway to the appointed place, her heart beating hopefully and happily in anticipation.

At last she reached the vine-covered shrine; it stood alone; no one was there.

'Cecil!' she said softly, and listened.

Then came a sound as of branches crackling, and a man clad like a Servian peasant started from behind the edifice and stood before her; but through the disguise, now minus the beard, and with close-shaven chin and well-trimmed black moustache, she knew the pale face of—Mattei Guebhard!

'You here?' exclaimed Margarita, shrinking back.

'Yes, I,' said he, grimly; 'you got a note——'

'From—from the Herr Lieutenant.'

'No; from *me*.'

'You?'

'In his name,' said Guebhard, laughing softly; 'could I have lured you here, else?'

'Decidedly not,' she replied, with perplexity and anger. 'But how knew you that I was to be here?'

'Every movement of yours is known to me.'

'And your purpose?' asked Margarita.

'I scarcely know — punishment — revenge!' he replied, incoherently and a a little wildly.

As he surveyed her now he saw not a vestige of her soft, persuasive, and caressing manner, or the witchery of her sovereign smile. Her face expressed only deep anger, profound disdain, and utter indifference by turns; yet he attempted to take her hand, but she wrenched it away and waved him back, with a grandeur of gesture that compelled him to obey, while her eyes flashed with unspoken indignation.

It was at this moment that the rose-pearl bracelet fell from her wrist, but both were too preoccupied to observe it.

'You visited the English cur in his prison?' said he, after a pause.

'Who told you so?'

'Heed not who told me so—suffice it that I know you did.'

'What then? Am I accountable to you for my actions?'

'This morning you are.'

'Fool—you forget yourself!'

Guebhard looked into her cool and defiant face, and read but too plainly an expression of hatred in her beautiful eyes. He saw the curl of careless scorn on her sweet red lips, and a sigh of rage escaped him, though for a moment—but a moment only—his eyes sought hers with an anguish of entreaty.

'Perjurer and deserter!' said she defiantly and bitterly; 'the soldier who is false to his colours—the man who is false to his country—is beneath rebuke; but not beneath vengeance.'

'You saved the man's life on one hand,' said he, hoarsely; 'on the other, you exposed me, compelling me to anticipate an old intention of joining the Turkish standard, which must prevail here and elsewhere. You saved his life and won his gratitude and love; but neither will avail, for by the God who hears us, you shall never see him more!'

'Who will separate us?'

'I shall!'

'Stand aside, Captain Guebhard!' said she haughtily, and now dreading every moment to hear the step of Cecil ascending the path; 'stand aside—from this day you and I must be to each other as the dead.'

'As the dead—yes—be it so. I know you hate me now—though once you did not do so.'

'I never even valued you as a friend, though you flattered yourself that you stood even higher than a friend in my estimation; and now as a deserter from the Servian cause——'

'I am more Bulgarian than Servian in my blood, perhaps more Italian than either,' said he, hotly. 'Milano omitted to give me the cross, though I had won it in our first battle, so I have assumed the crescent in its place; that is all—and the crescent will prevail in the end.'

'Never! we shall live to see the crescent thrust into Asia or the sea; but as I did not come here to talk politics, I have the

honour to wish you good-morning, Captain Guebhard, and trust that our comedietta is over.'

'It is a tragedy, as you may find,' was the grim and menacing response.

'What do you mean, sir?'

'Simply what I say.'

'Insolent! But I fear you will never make your fortune as a Romeo.'

Oaths never rose to the lips of Guebhard; he was—though a finished villain—too polished a man to indulge in such: but terrible was the hatred that baffled passion was now raising in his lawless breast. A dark and angry red shot for a moment across his usually pallid face, and his eyes gleamed with a vindictiveness of expression that made the heart of Margarita throb wildly, and with sudden apprehension; but she could not pass him.

Behind her was a precipice, and before her—barred by him—lay the path which she must descend to elude him.

Like a heroine, who is described in a recent novel, 'she knew well enough that

forgetfulness was a treasure for evermore beyond the reach of those who once loved her.' Guebhard had loved her, she knew, and this love had well-nigh maddened him —and now Guebhard, in his tiger-like nature, was beginning to hate her—nay, hated her already!

He grasped her delicate wrist with a force she could not withstand.

'Listen to me,' said he, with calm yet sad ferocity in his tone and eyes; 'I am not the first, among many, whom your beauty and your wiles have fooled and beguiled—for few women have had such Circe-like power as you—but I shall be the last on whose face you will look.'

'What do you mean?' she asked, in a low and agitated voice.

'That you will soon learn—come here,' he continued, hoarsely; 'here—and look down,' he added, dragging her to the giddy verge of the beetling cliff, at the base of which, spread out like a map, was the woody landscape stretching away towards

Katadar, with the Morava winding through it like a silver snake.

'Have pity, Guebhard!' exclaimed Margarita, shrinking back, while a mortal terror seized her now, for the expression of his eyes froze her heart.

'Pity—it is too late—too late!' he replied, yet with something like a sob in his throat.

'Forgiveness is saint-like, Guebhard,' she urged piteously.

'But I am no saint, Margarita—I am only a humble mortal.'

'Mortal or not—man or devil—why have I to seek forgiveness of *you?*' she exclaimed, as a gust of indignation and pride came to her aid, and she strove to break away from him; but finding that all her efforts were vain, and that he was too strong for her, she shrieked out wildly, 'Cecil! Cecil!'

The name seemed to madden him. Stung to frenzy, he drew a pistol from his belt; but replaced it, and grasped his yataghan; that, too, he declined to use, lest

it might elicit a shriek again and bring succour, for with all his frenzy, there was a method in his madness, and his next thought was—strangulation !

The proud and lovely neck she would not have permitted him to kiss was now to feel the tiger-like clutch of his long, lean and felon fingers, as they closed round her snow-white throat.

'Mercy, Guebhard—mercy!' she gasped; 'I am too young—too young—perhaps too wicked—to die !'

Fate was upon her, and Guebhard was no longer a reasoning being. There were tears in her starting and bloodshot eyes, and clamorous fury gathered in Guebhard's heart, while his infernal gripe grew closer; her arms fell powerless by her side—he felt the tumultuous heavings of her bosom against his own. Sense had not left her; she could not doubt the desperate character of his attack, and though she ceased to struggle, her eyes spoke, and with such a language that Guebhard dared not look on them again—they seemed so mournfully to

implore his mercy—but his heart, blazing with the insensate hate that springs from baffled love, knew none!

In vain; his gripe grew tighter upon her delicate throat, that was all symmetry and whiteness: a terrible spasm convulsed her frame; then he knew that all was over, that she was dead in his hands, and daring no more to look upon her, he flung her over the awful cliff close by; and that he might not hear the sound, if any, that came from below, he sank on his knees, and covered his ears with his hot tremulous hands. So perished Margarita!

Her death was not the first that lay on Guebhard's soul, no doubt; but, for a minute, he scarcely seemed to breathe, and his wild glaring eyes seemed to wander stealthily in the air, in the woods, and on the ground beneath him, as if to avoid the last glance of appealing despair, that seemed to confront him everywhere now.

The leaves of the trees seemed to become eyes—then tongues that whispered, he knew not what.

'Margarita!' said he involuntarily, and, to his overstrained fancy, a thousand echoes seemed to give back the name of the dead —the dead girl that, though mangled and lying far down below, was not yet cold.

'Margarita!' he said again, but in a lower voice, the name breaking from him in the instinct of the awful time, rather than in conscious utterance.

Suddenly the sound of approaching footsteps met his ear. A man was ascending the pathway to the shrine, and Guebhard, who, in the agony and frenzy of the time, had forgotten all about Cecil—for it was he who was coming — dashed into the copse-wood and fled from the spot like a hunted hare, seeking the gloomiest spots with that loathing of the light which it has been averred some murderers feel.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BATTLE OF ZAITCHAR.

'HOW misfortune seems to dog me, and all in whom I have ever had a passing interest or regard!' thought Cecil, as he rode on in rear of his returning party, and recalled the words of Antonio:

> 'I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano;
> A stage, where every man must play a part,
> And mine a *sad one*.'

His thoughts went backward over the few but ever-varying years of his own life; his wanderings with his mother in Italy and elsewhere; his service in India, so full of adventure, change, peril and vivid colour;

marches over dusty and arid plains, and through desert jungles, where luxuriant vegetation had run riot for ages; the pleasures of cities; the careless times in camp and barrack, with Leslie Fotheringhame, Dick Freeport, Acharn and others; pig-sticking and fighting wild hill tribes; of long balmy nights on the starlit Indian or Arabian seas, while the crowded transport ploughed on with her living freight; the good fellowship of the splendid mess; the love of his men, and though remembered last, perhaps, not least, honest Tommy Atkins, with the proffer of his savings; of all that had been, and never could be again; of gay nights and balls; and, last of all, the ball that ruined him; of Mary Montgomerie, and all the loss of her meant to him; and again his thoughts would revert to Margarita, and to what had been—what could be now, her fate!

Into that fate—if, as it seemed too probable, some tragedy or catastrophe had happened—he had neither time nor opportunity given him to inquire.

What could have come over her? was his ever-recurring thought. Surely—even in that land of atrocities—Heaven would be too merciful to let a hair of her head be injured, she was so good and pure, so proud and true to herself and all.

Betimes he rode into Deligrad, where the tricolour waved on the armed rampart, and the busy camp, with its streets of tents and huts, still covered all the ground beside the Morava.

He proceeded straight to the winter quarters of the staff, circular huts formed of logs, planked and plastered with mud externally, and thatched with straw and reeds, and in one of these miserable abodes, before which two sentinels paced, he found Tchernaieff and a couple of officers, in rich Russian uniforms, smoking cigars, and making themselves as comfortable as they could under the circumstances.

He presented his papers, sketches and memoranda, and made his report as to finding all the country quiet, and seeing nothing of the enemy's scouting or patrol

parties; and was warmly complimented by the grim old Muscovite, who shook him by the hand and presented him with an acceptable bumper of wine, saying the while, 'Deo Gratios!' and signing the cross in the Russian fashion, with three fingers from right to left.

'I sent you again on a perilous and important duty into a strange country,' said Tchernaieff, 'and you accepted the hazard as readily as you have performed that duty.'

'I am not used to weigh hazards or danger, excellency,' replied Cecil; 'I am the native of a country that never nurtured fools or cowards, and now have my home here.'

'In every land brave men find a home; and for these memoranda I thank you, for I have to send troops through that very district towards Zaitchar. But you have run greater risks than you are aware of, for Circassian troops were concealed in some of the woods through which you passed.'

Cecil thought of the disappearance of Margarita, and the evidence of the deserter Guebhard's presence at the Krall Lazar; but he only replied:

'I have not set much store on my life, since I came to Servia, at least. Besides, general—of what need was thought—I had your orders to obey—the King to serve.'

'Right; and now, good-morning, Captain Falconer.'

It was so; Cecil found that he had been made captain of his troop, and was warmly congratulated on this unexpected promotion by his English comrades Pelham and Stanley, whose society he preferred to all others in camp, and the former said laughingly to the latter, whom he had taken into his confidence:

'Either the count is—as I hope—a false prophet, or Falconer's fated time is not come yet; he has returned scatheless from this duty, at all events.'

The field was soon to be taken by a portion, if not by all the army; more

fighting was to be seen, and Cecil, in the overcharged state of his mind, welcomed the chance of new excitement with a strange species of grim joy.

But now came tidings that, when returning for the headquarters of General Dochtouroff, Count Palenka had fallen into the hands of a Circassian patrol, been made prisoner, and carried, whether to death or captivity, none knew; so that he, anyway, was ignorant of the crime, or catastrophe, that had darkened his home.

At this time, some twelve battalions of Turks occupied the town of Zaitchar, which lies seventy miles north-eastward of Deligrad, on the river Timok, and in the attack on which, on the 18th of the preceding July, Colonel Kireef, one of the bravest officers of the Russian army, fell, after receiving four wounds in succession.

This position was now watched by only a brigade of Servians, under Colonel Medvidovski, a young officer concerning whose movements and rashness Tchernaieff became apprehensive; thus he desired

General Dochtouroff to repair to that place for the purpose of aiding the colonel with his advice and experience, and soon after he reinforced him by a few Servians, among whom was Cecil's troop of cavalry, which was ordered to proceed by the Bovan Pass, up which his troopers toiled slowly in an autumn evening, and from the summit of which a vast expanse of woody country could be seen, wearing all the varied tints of the season. A twelve miles march brought him to Banja, where he halted for a time, and then resumed his route over the mountains, by a path sometimes so narrow that he had to reduce his sections of fours to files, but all pushed on unwearyingly and full of enthusiasm, as a battle in the vicinity of Zaitchar was confidently anticipated.

In the ranks of the army against which they were marching now was, no doubt, his bitter enemy, Mattei Guebhard, commissioned and with rank, probably, because of his defection, and Cecil knew that in

close quarters the rascal, if possible, would be sure to seek *him* out.

'Well,' thought he, 'he is right welcome to do so;' aware that if once he got Mattei Guebhard covered by his pistol or within reach of his sword it would go hard with him if one red fez was not struck to the dust.

The smoke of burning hamlets, which had fallen a prey to bands of Bashi Bazouks, curled up here and there through the russet, green and yellow of the woods, on either side of the line of march, indicating the close approach to the vicinity of the enemy, whose troops were mustering near the Timok, after crossing which, by a wooden bridge, Cecil could see the white-walled houses of Zaitchar shining in the sun; but from thence he had to proceed, by marching in the night, into the valley of Krivovirski Timok, where he overtook the troops under General Dochtouroff, to whom he instantly reported himself, and Colonel Medvidovski, pushing on for the great business of the day.

The cavalry cloaks were rolled up and buckled to the saddles, girths and bridle reins carefully inspected, the edges of the swords tested, and the loading of all revolvers and carbines looked to.

A drizzling rain had fallen overnight, and a dim, silvery haze was floating up from the dark woodlands and the deep valley through which the Timok was rolling away to meet the Danube, and the occasional boom of a heavy gun pealing through the murky morning air, followed now and then by a sharp rattle of rifle-muskets, indicated that the column of Count Keller, who was acting in concert with Dochtouroff, and had already got into action, had been partially repulsed, and was retiring.

'Push on!' was the cry on every hand.

'*Rishu* (trot), *galloppe!* (gallop)' were the orders for the cavalry, and in sections of fours that arm of the service went quickly to the front, and with loud cheers, though to the infantry was assigned most of the grim work to be done that day.

Cecil, in India, and more recently in Servia, had been too often under fire to feel any novelty in the situation now. Rather reckless, he had no particular anxiety so far as concerned his own safety or ultimate escape. He had but one distinct idea: that rather than be disabled by a wound, and thus rendered helpless, homeless, and penniless, he would prefer death outright!

He felt for a time a little tightening of the chest as the hollow boom of the cannon on the left front became louder and louder; but even that sensation passed away, and he rode on with much of indifference, varied at times by that emotion which a true soldier—especially a soldier of fortune—can never be without—a desire for distinction and honour.

The whole scene around him was inspiriting and full of the highest excitement. Heavily laboured the horses of the artillery to get the guns and ponderous waggons up the steep ascents that overhung the river. At each recurring rise

the drivers flogged and spurred, and the gunners pushed behind, or with sinewy hands urged round the spokes of the wheels; horses stumbled, and traces strained to the verge of breaking, till the hill crests were won, and the downward progress began.

Fifteen thousand Servians and Russians were forming in columns for the attack, and the bright sheen of bayonets and swords flashing in the morning sun came out of their sombre masses of brown, grey, and dark green. Over the former waved the tricolours of Milano Obrenovitch; but the black eagle and tricolour of the 'Monarch of the Snows' were displayed by the latter.

Zaitchar was to be the centre of the operations, and to maintain that position were sixteen thousand Turks or more, who had covered it with earthworks and batteries for three miles in front of the town, defending it in the form of an arc.

Many of the Servian regiments were armed with old muzzle-loaders and smooth-bores, while the blue-clad Turks, whose

fezzes in long scarlet lines dotted out the position, had breechloading Snider rifles and Krupp cannon; so the two armies were far from being equally matched, either in appointments or valour.

Count Keller's column, descending from the mountains on the south coast, was to co-operate with Dochtouroff against Zaitchar; Medvidovski's column formed the centre, and other brigades and columns, led by leaders who have no connection with our story, and whose barbarous names would only puzzle the reader, made up the force which menaced the little town of Zaitchar in the form of a semicircle, at an average radius of seven miles.

The cracking of rifles and the white spurts of smoke starting up from fields, green hedges, and other enclosures, indicated the commencement of the attack, as some companies in skirmishing order were thrown out on right and left, and then came the thunder of the Krupp guns from Veliki Izvor, the chief point of the Turkish position.

In their brown tunics and blue, glengarry-like caps, the Servian columns were closing steadily up, with loud hoarse cheers and cries; but louder and higher above them rang the 'Allah-Allah Hu!' of the more confident and resolute Turkish infantry.

From a five gun-battery on the right, Herzberg, a skilful officer, was throwing shells with great precision among the latter, and Cecil viewed with growing interest a column of Servian infantry deploying from that point with greater skill and order than he had seen in Servia before, as it was led by two brave and well-trained British officers, Pelham and Stanley. Down the hill this column came at a rush under the fire of the Turkish gunners, who from amid the dim smoke on Veliki Izvor threw shells thick and fast among them; but the column was under the shelter of a wood, amid the russet and yellow foliage of which it disappeared, until it emerged again to open fire upon the enemy's lines, now almost completely en-

veloped in smoke, while the roar of rifle-musketry made the welkin ring. But the column which had deployed and advanced so well was repulsed by the Turks, and fell back, disputing every inch of ground; nor could any effort on the part of Pelham, Stanley, and other officers induce the soldiers of it to reform and advance again: for the Servians are but timid men at best.

Over dead and wounded men and horses, over ground torn, furrowed, and cut up by bursting shells and artillery wheels, over gouts of blood and pools of water, the Servians were now falling confusedly back, after terrible losses, when Dochtouroff gave the order for the reserve to advance.

'Up they jumped, without waiting for any second order,' says a British officer in his narrative, 'and ran with great speed, firing off their guns and cheering loudly. There was only one fault to be found with them, and that was that they unfortunately ran and fired in the *wrong* direction! In vain Dochtouroff shouted; in vain he

swore, but they only ran the faster. I asked him to allow me to try and compel them, with the aid of my sword and revolver, to halt, front, and charge the enemy. "No, no," said he; "they are not worth wasting powder on. Nothing can stop them, and the day is lost."'

On all sides now were heard the shrieks and half-stifled groans of the wounded, the last sobs of the dying, and piteous entreaties for water or for aid. Faces paled by death and smeared with blood were everywhere; the green grass, the purple violets of autumn that grew wild, like the white cups of the arum lilies, were all splashed and empurpled with the same ghastly tint. The bodies in some places lay across each other in piles, the swarthy, brown-clad Servian soldier and the more swarthy Turk, with his red fez and his shining military buttons, the badge worn by all ranks, from the Sultan to the drummer-boy.

By some mistake the Servian artillery were prematurely ordered to retire, and

thus, as the supports had failed, the retreat became general, and by three in the afternoon the action was over; but ere this Cecil had been in one or two cavalry charges to check pursuit, and to do him justice, General Dochtouroff left nothing undone by personal example and by brief harangues in Servian and Russian to prevent the retreat from becoming a headlong rout along the Lukova road.

Outstripping the *Assakiri Mansurei Mohamedïges,* as the regular infantry of the Turkish army boast themselves to be, some of their cavalry came on with wonderful *élan.* At one point Cecil got his squadron to form a front by going threes about, as a corps of Turkish lancers came on, with swords jangling, accoutrements rattling, and their green pennons—the holy colour—streaming straight out over their scarlet fezzes. A sharp, short word of command in Turkish, a sharper note from a trumpet, the lance-points flashed in the air as they came down to the charge, and the horses from a rapid trot

rushed on in a wild gallop, and in a moment there was a shock, a crash, and a wild and terrible *mêlée.*

Saddles were emptied, and steeds and riders went down on every side; but Cecil's Servians, despite his fiery example, could make no impression on the Turks. Resolute in aspect, beetle-browed, keen-eyed, and hawk-nosed, they come on with heads stooped in full career, their cries of 'Allah, Allah!' rending the air; and whenever a Servian, sword in hand, attempted to close, their couched lances bristled against his arm or his horse's breast; so the former pressed on, in an invulnerable line, till Cecil's troopers fairly gave way, and quitted the field on the spur with bridles loose, sweeping him away with them, for Servian courage and Servian honour were sorely tarnished on that day in front of Zaitchar; nor did the cavalry and other fugitives fairly stop till they reached a place called Balgivac, some thirteen miles from the field of battle, where Medvidovski and his staff had halted.

Dispirited and disgusted with the result of the day—not that he had any vital interest in it—but, wet, cold, weary and exhausted, Cecil flung himself on the bare earth, like nearly all around him, without food or rations of any kind; and thus he was found by Stanley, Pelham and another English volunteer, who shared his brandy-flask with them all, and they spent the remainder of the night in comparing notes of the past day's heartless work, reviling the Servians, their want of mettle and discipline, and drawing comparisons between them and 'our own fellows,' that were far from flattering to the troops of His Majesty King Milano Obrenovitch.

CHAPTER XV.

A RIDE FOR LIFE OR DEATH!

CECIL'S troop, which had lost heavily in the encounter with the Turkish lancers, escorted some of the wounded and sick to the camp at Deligrad, passing through a beautiful valley, and skirting the slopes of Mount Urtanj, one of the greatest hills in Servia. The way was of the roughest and steepest kind; his progress was slow, with a convoy of blood-stained, tattered and dying creatures. It was a march he never forgot, and from one circumstance, perhaps, more than all. He met *en route* the old village pope (or priest) of Palenka,

mounted on one of the shaggy, hardy little ponies, and from him—amid many an exclamation of lamentation, sorrow and anathema—he learned distinct tidings of the fate of Margarita, and that her remains had been found by some woodcutters at the base of the cliff below the Krall Lazar chapel, and a storm of terrible emotion swelled up in Cecil's heart, as he listened to the broken accents of the priest. Great was his horror and great his pity! He forgot all the vengeance he personally owed Guebhard in this new, unthought-of and more terrible debt, and sadly and touchingly the rare beauty of the dead girl and her devotion to himself came back to memory now!

Full of thought that could take no coherent form in words, he rode on as one in a dream, and almost oblivious now of all around him; of the sufferings of those who formed his miserable convoy; of the dark blood dripping through the straw, from half-dressed wounds, that burst out afresh; of the groans and cries elicited by

every jolt of the clumsy ambulance waggons; of the monotonous rumbling of the wheels that shook and jarred against ruts and stones; even of the deaths that were occurring from time to time, leaving the dead and the living side by side, while the forest birds of prey hovered over his sorrowful line of march, and followed it, in anticipation of a banquet.

He thought of Margarita, who, he felt assured, had perished thus awfully through her love for himself, and through the assignation made at the way-side chapel—an assignation of which Guebhard must—by some unaccountable means—have become cognisant; and then he thought of Guebhard, the half Bulgarian, and sighed in fury through his clenched teeth—'Oh, to be near Guebhard, but for a minute!'

But the latter was nearer *him* then he could well have imagined.

For food and rest, and to have his wounded attended to, and the dead taken from amid the living to a place of interment, he halted at a village which was in-

dicated in his 'route,' on the slope of Mount Mezlani, just as darkness was closing in, and through the net work of the forest branches the western sky glowed vivid with lurid light, though darkness had fallen on the valleys far below the mountain slopes, and a busy time he had of it, with a couple of surgeons, a staff of soldier-nurses and orderlies, going from waggon to waggon, and hearing but one reiterated story of suffering, one repeated chorus of cries, moans and often curses.

Seeking the only *cafane* in the place, he dismounted at the door, had a dish of hot *poprikash* and black coffee, dashed well with brandy—of which, as his duty was not yet over, he partook standing, and was in the act of lighting a cigarette, when a man, dressed like a Servian peasant, but marvellously well mounted for such, approached the door, and without quitting his saddle, asked in a low and timid, or somewhat uncertain voice, for some refreshment.

The voice of the stranger gave Cecil a

species of electric shock, for 'there is no instinct so rapid and so unerring as the instinct of a foe;' and despite the voluminous dark beard and peasant garb, he recognised the clearly cut features, the hawk-like nose with delicate nostrils, and the black beady eyes of Guebhard!

The voice, the sight, the presence of this man after the awful narrative of the village pope so recently told, and now acting suspiciously as a spy in the interests of the enemy, roused Cecil's blood to fever heat. As a deserter, spy and assassin, this man's life was trebly forfeited, and Cecil left his seat, slowly and deliberately to avoid giving alarm, and feeling in his heart a grim sweetness in the idea that the destroyer of Margarita was to perish by *his* hand!

But, as he moved towards the door of the *cafane*, the light of a lamp fell upon him, and he was instantly recognised by the renegade, who remained in his saddle outside an open window.

Guebhard started violently; a ferocious

vindictiveness sparkled in his eyes; his face grew paler with rage and alarm that were evidently mingled with a panther-like desire to rush at Cecil. He ground his teeth; he quivered in every limb; and then, suddenly seized by a panic of fear, fired three shots from a revolver at Cecil, wheeled round his horse and galloped away.

Every shot went wide of its mark, and another moment saw Cecil in his saddle, in hot pursuit, guided for a time only by the sound of the flying hoofs. Careless of whither he rode, even if right into the Turkish lines, he dashed on, goring his horse with sharp rowels at every bound.

'Halt, dog and scoundrel!—halt, or die!' he cried again and again.

Guebhard was now about a hundred yards ahead, but that distance lessened fast as Cecil tore after him, his pistol levelled twenty times ere he would risk a shot, as there was no time for reloading, and the night-clouds were deepening fast.

They were in full race—pursuer and

pursued. Cecil fired two chambers; but both must have missed, as Guebhard neither winced nor fell, but fired at random in return.

'The fiend take him!' was the latter's thought; 'he baulked my night's work once, and slew my Montenegrin comrade, and I have already missed him, shot after shot!'

Without other thought than flight, Guebhard, aware that he was unable to defend himself now that his pistols were empty, and knowing that his personal strength and skill with the sword were inferior to those of Cecil's, spurred wildly on and on, with every respiration tasting all the bitterness of anticipated death in his coward heart, expecting every instant to feel a shot pierce his back like a red-hot bolt and stretch him there to feed the wolves and carrion crows.

Guebhard, perhaps, was not quite a coward by nature; but somehow the panic of an utter poltroon possessed him now. Was it the terrible deed he had

done at the chapel of Krall Lazar that unnerved his heart and unstrung his sinews? It must have been so. The last glance he had seen in the eyes of Margarita haunted him; and he thought of that delicate and faultless form lying mangled at the foot of the cliff to become the prey of vultures and wild animals now, when his own end seemed so terribly close and nigh, at the hands of her avenger—the man he had so often wantonly wronged, and who, he knew, would be pitiless as a famished tiger.

If he had remorse, it was curiously mingled with an emotion of jealous triumph, that to this man Margarita was lost for ever—wrested from him by his hands, as we have said, and that Death alone was her possessor now!

'Coward, rein up!—your sword—your sword to mine!' cried Cecil, more than once; but neither taunt, sneer, nor threat availed him then.

At this time he felt in his heart much of that emotion which a writer calls 'the

religion of revenge, which had been sacred to his forefathers, in the age when murderers were proven by bier-right, and for wrong, the Fiery Cross of war was borne alight over moor and mountain.'

Fiercely, high and tumultuously, coursed the blood through his veins. Every muscle was strained, like those of a race-horse in the field, for he had an awful penalty to exact, and Guebhard knew well that he had a terrible debt to pay—one for which not even his life and the last drop of his blood would atone.

Yet Guebhard, perhaps, could not have told whether he most loved or hated the memory of the girl he had destroyed.

He knew that too probably, if steel and lead failed, if once in the grasp of Cecil, the latter would trample him to death, choke him like a viper with a heel upon his throat; and, sooth to say, such was the terrible idea that occurred to the pursuer at times while, with fiery exultation, he found himself gaining upon his prey.

The sweat of a great mortal agony

gathered on the temples of Guebhard; his mouth was parched; his breath came short and fast; and, half-turning in his saddle, he could see, in the starlight, the white set face of his pursuer almost within arm's length of him, and the outstretched head of his horse more than once actually in a line with his crupper.

The black beard had fallen off now.

'How,' thought Cecil; 'how came it to pass that this man, so full of the common vulgar terror of mere physical peril, ever turned soldier—even in name!'

He next thought it was fortunate that, owing to the slowness of the past day's march, and the short length of it, his horse was tolerably fresh; but that of Guebhard seemed to be in the same condition.

He recalled the assassin-like attempts on his own life; his being tracked in the forest; wellnigh done to death and buried alive; he recalled the forged document which brought, for a time, dishonour on him and destruction close indeed; but more than

all did he think of Margarita, done to death so terribly; and Guebhard thought of all these things as he rode wildly on, and the other as wildly and madly pursued him.

He had wrested her from his enemy, and what he had done he would not have undone even had he the power. Since she would not, and could not, be his, she was lost to the other—dead!—taken by his hand, and yet he feared to die!

Whatever the wretch Guebhard felt when alone was given way to there, in the darkness, to the full. No spectator or chance visitor—none of those with whom he had mingled in the Turkish camp—ever saw a change in the pale, delicate, and immutable face of the destroyer, or could have detected the dread secret his calm, soft smile concealed.

He had always feared, however, that sooner or later retribution would come; that his desertion, if not his other crimes, would find him out, and strike him down in the hour of fancied security, and now

—now it seemed that the time of fate had come!

Cecil's last shot had been expended; but as revolver-firing is always dubious, and in certainty every way inferior to the old single or double-barrelled pistol, that shot had only grazed the shoulder of Guebhard, who was next aware that Cecil had drawn his sword, the steel blade of which glittered blue and grim in the starry light!

Where were their horses taking them—towards the Morava, or the valley of the Timok?

Cecil gave no thought to this, nor cared; down steep pathways, jagged with rocks; through orchards, more than once; past fields of flax and Indian corn; past walls laden with vines; past houses and farmsteads, sunk in darkness and silence; past villages, where pariah dogs barked and howled at them; through woods, where the interwoven foliage was dense above, and the late violets grew thick and fragrant below, and the wild acanthus spread its beautiful leaves.

Anon, down narrow gorges where the arbutus and laurel overhung the way; then thundering along the worn pavement of some old Roman road; now so close that they could hear each other breathing; and anon, a horse's length asunder, as some obstruction—a laurel root or a vine tendril—gave momentary hopes to the fugitive.

Of the way he went in this night ride for death and life—for retribution and punishment—Cecil had no knowledge and took no heed; he seemed to follow it, as we follow paths in dreams; yet he did so unvaryingly, and unswervingly.

At last the darkness became so intense by the thickness of the foliage overhead, in a deep and narrow way, that Cecil failed to make out the figure of the fugitive for a time.

The sound of their own breathing and that of their horses, with the crash of the hoofs, alone broke the stillness of the night—of the world it almost seemed—where all things slept amid the utter tranquillity that had fallen everywhere.

They rushed down steeps, where the loose and perilous stones emitted showers of sparks when struck by the iron hoofs; the necks of their horses were outstretched like those of racers; their flanks heaved, and their bridles and breasts were covered with white foam flecks.

In the gloomy way, under the forest trees, Cecil—we have said—failed to see the figure of him he pursued—but he could hear his horse's hoofs crashing on before him, and he followed the sound. He neared the animal, a grey, closer and closer, as now its speed seemed to slacken; with a low fierce exclamation, he came abreast of it, only to find the saddle empty, and the rider—gone!

But whether the latter had taken his feet out of the stirrups, caught the branch of a tree and swung himself up into it, or threw himself off amid some thick underwood and crept quietly and safely away, Cecil could not determine. But one fact remained; he saw no more of Guebhard for that night!

His mortification and disappointment at being suddenly baffled thus, were extreme; and his disgust was enhanced in no small degree by the humiliating conviction, that the sooner he was clear of that identical wooded way the better for himself, as he knew not from what tree, or clump of underwood he might, at any moment, be covered by the pistol of Guebhard, lurking in security and unseen.

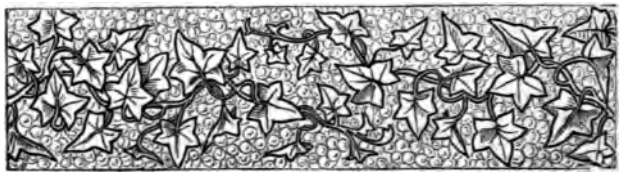
Where was he now, and how to find his way back to where he had left his convoy of ambulance waggons?

He had noted no land marks—taken no heed of the way he had come. He had seen before him Guebhard, and Guebhard only! He must have ridden many miles —how many he knew not, and now his horse was weary and blown.

Fortunately for him, his orders were to halt at the village he had left for the night, and to begin the next day's march at noon, or as soon after as the wants of the woundedand sick had been attended to; and steering his way chiefly by the stars, he

rode slowly on his return, with an irritating sense of annoyance, humiliation, and disquietude, as, for all he knew, he might be close in the vicinity of the enemy and fall into their hands.

He rode slowly and warily, and fortune favoured him; about dawn he found himself near the little town of Kragojeratz, on the right bank of the river Lepenitza, a tributary of the Morava, and there his Servian uniform at once procured him a mounted guide to the village he had left, and from which he was then about twenty miles distant.



CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT THE 'TIMES' TOLD.

JADED and weary, Cecil began the homeward march, and strange to say, the effect of the long and revengeful pursuit of Guebhard on his mind was this: that he felt—if not less resentment and hatred against that personage—a desire that when condign punishment befell him, it might come from some other hand than his.

He felt somewhat soothed by a conviction of the abject terror and deep humiliation to which he had subjected Guebhard; yet, ever and anon, the narrative of the village pope gave his heart a pang of positive pain.

Again in Deligrad, to him the scene of so much suffering and unmerited degradation.

'What am I to do now with the remainder of this life that is left to me?' he thought, wearily, as he dismounted from his horse, and tossed the bridle reins to his orderly, leaving his painful convoy now to the care of the doctors and nurses, though many were there who were beyond all human care, and would only answer now to the reveille that would be heard in the unknown land.

He gladly sought out the log hut shared by Stanley and Pelham, whose regiment, with many more of the troops lately engaged in the assault on the Turkish lines at Zaitchar, had now come into cantonments. As an abode, the hut was nearly as wretched as any of ours in the Crimea.

The soil of the floor was banked up in the centre and at the sides; the former acting as the site of a fireplace, the latter for two beds. Four upright posts driven into the earth and boarded all round,

formed the chimney, and thereon hung swords, revolver cases, field glasses, flasks, pannikins, etc.

A few boxes, bullock trunks and bottles full or empty, formed the furniture, and upon a species of couch improvised from the former and covered by a bear's skin lay Stanley, in half undress, with a cigar in his mouth. His figure was tall and slight, and it set off the dingy brown uniform, more than the latter set off him. He had the upright military carriage he had won in the Household Brigade; he had still the suppleness of youth, and eyes that had lost none of their fine, clear and honest fire of expression.

He sprang to his feet as Cecil entered and gave him a cheery shout of welcome. Pelham was on duty, but Stanley duly did the honours of their mutual abode, and produced from some mysterious receptacle dishes, glasses, knives, cold ration beef with tomato salad (tomatoes were plentiful in the camp at Deligrad), bread, wine and a box of havannas. He bustled about like

a frank jolly Englishman as he was now, and all unlike the *blasé* frequenter of Belgravian ball-rooms he had been, and would yet become again; but while listening to Cecil's exciting account of his race over night, it was evident to the narrator that he had in his face a preoccupied and perplexed expression, though rather a bright one.

'What is up, old fellow?' asked Cecil, who had been observing him narrowly; 'you seem as if you had something on your mind—something cheery too. Are you about to quit this work as not very remunerative?'

'That I shall no doubt do in time, if some Turkish bullet does not knock me on the head,' replied Pelham, as he carefully selected a fresh cigar; 'but I have something in my mind—whether cheery or not, I cannot say; but finish your meal—fill your glass again, and then we'll have a talk about it.'

While Cecil satisfied an appetite the result of much recent exposure and exercise,

Stanley produced a worn, frayed and very tattered copy of the *Times*—a copy that was now a month or two old.

'By Jove! when I look upon this paper, "how the old time comes o'er me," as Claud Melnotte says,' exclaimed Stanley; 'and Regent Street, the Row, the clubs with their bow-windows, the parks, the coaching meet, the collar days at Buckingham Palace—the bank guard, pocketing the guinea and punishing the port, the West End—how London, one and all, with its beauties, comforts and luxuries appear in mental procession, making one long to leave Servia and Servian affairs to the care of the devil; for the lark is over—the game played out; I for one have had enough of it, and home is now the place for me!'

Cecil sighed.

He had no—*home!*

'To what is all this the preface?' he asked.

'To nothing; it is only the expression of my own thoughts; but there is a notice in the *War Office Gazette* here—where the

deuce—oh, here it is. I have heard you speak, more than once, quite incidentally, of the Cameronians.'

'Likely enough—I knew some of them —once.'

Cecil winced as he spoke, for Stanley was eyeing him keenly, and then said:

'Look here, old fellow, do you know anything of this—this name—Pelham and I have been puzzling our brains over the announcement.'

Cecil took the paper and gave a violent start, with a half suppressed exclamation, as he read:

'CAMERONIANS—The name of the officer, the proceedings of the court-martial on whom were cancelled, and who was re-gazetted to this regiment in last week's *Gazette*, is Captain Cecil Falconer Montgomerie—*not* Captain Cecil Falconer, as formerly.'

'Montgomerie—what *can* this mean!' said Cecil almost involuntarily, and feeling

intensely perplexed. He was, beyond all description, startled too, while a great rush of joy and hope mingled in his heart, with the surprise that possessed him. The notice —the cancelled proceedings of the court-martial, and the name evidently referred to himself, but whence came this addition—the surname of Montgomerie ?

Stanley was watching him silently. Was all this the clue to much apparent mental suffering, that Pelham and himself had suspected and seen ? Was this the explanation of much in his manner that seemed reserved and curt, when 'the service' was spoken of, though they both suspected shrewdly that he had been in it —was 'an army man ?'

'You colour painfully, Cecil, old fellow,' said he, patting him kindly on the shoulder; 'but, if this gazette refers to you——'

'It does—it must—but why am I named Montgomerie ?' exclaimed Cecil, impetuously. 'I have the name of Falconer.'

'You have been in some scrape perhaps —who among us has lived a life without pain, or who among us has been without reproach?'

'I have lived a life—latterly at least—that has had much of pain in it; and if there was any reproach, it was unmerited —all!'

'I can well believe it, and congratulate you heartily,' exclaimed Stanley, clasping his passive hand, while Cecil, still as one in a dream, muttered about the name of 'Montgomerie?'

'By Jove,' said Stanley, as a sudden light broke upon him; 'I remember your affair now, and the noise it made at mess-tables. Well, well—court-martials are not infallible—neither are the Horse Guards authorities, for the matter of that. I remember when we were lying in the Wellington Barracks, how a fellow in the Coldstreams—but have another glass of wine!'

'Oh, Stanley,' said Cecil, in a broken voice, 'you do not know—and never, never

may you know—what it is, and has been, to live on day after day, under the cloud that cast a gloom on my life! To bear, with a dull aching of the heart—to exist under a cloud and unexplainable shadow, trying by some brilliant act, hoping by well-done service, to redeem my name in this——'

'Well—in this devil of a country, to which Pelham and I came, for a new sensation, in search of a spree, in fact. I know the world, Cecil—it is a cruel world, even to the strong; and the best of us get into scrapes with it.'

'But I got into none—at least, none that I can understand or explain,' replied Cecil, a little incoherently.

'Yet you were—were——'

'Dismissed!'

'Poor fellow—I remember well; and this notice?'

'Refers to me—it must—the sentence of dismissal has been cancelled; though I cannot understand how, or through whom. I thought I had not a friend in the world

—save one,' he added, as he thought of Mary.

'How did all this cursed evil come about?'

And Cecil told him all—at least so far as he knew.

'I see it all, as plain as a pikestaff!' exclaimed Stanley, when the latter concluded; 'something has turned up—something new come to light, and they've reinstated you. You were dismissed generally, not specifically, and so rendered incapable of serving Her Majesty again; it makes all the difference in the world! Another bumper of wine, to re-wet the old commission!'

Cecil drained the glass like one who was sore athirst, for he was then under considerable mental excitement.

Restored to his rank and to the old Cameronians—the cloud under which he had left the service, and which so nearly broke his heart, dispelled! The proceedings of that most fatal court-martial, which in his dreams had so often haunted him as

a nightmare—cancelled, as if they had never been; how had all this come to pass, and who was the guardian angel that had brought it about?

A fever of impatience possessed him. But he could not yet, with honour, quit the Servian army, though he had the power of resigning at any moment. He had no official letter; perhaps the Horse Guards knew not where he was—and letters, if any, for him, might be at the bottom of the Morava, as a mishap had befallen the mail; and more than all, a general action—a great battle, a decisive one for Servia, was confidently believed to be upon the tapis.

Then he would think, if it should be all some mysterious mistake, and this notice referred, by a blunder, to some one else—a mistake, after all—after all! for he had been so long accustomed to the frowns of Fortune, that he feared she would never smile upon him permanently again.

'By the way, old fellow,' said Stanley, suddenly, 'there is a letter for you, in the

care of Pelham; it may throw some light on all this.'

'A letter—official?'

'No.'

'A letter—from whom?'

'How should I know?' said Stanley, laughing; 'it is all over postmarks, anyway. The dragoon bringing the mails from Belgrade was shot by some Circassians, and fell into the Morava. Some woodman saved a bag or two, but the letters were nearly destroyed; and here comes Pelham with yours. We only got duns from London tradesmen, and laughed as we lit our pipes with them here.'

CHAPTER XVII.

MARY'S LETTER.

WHETHER he thanked Pelham for what he brought him; how he bade the former and Stanley adieu, and in what terms he did so, Cecil never gave thought to, nor did he remember; he was only aware of one fact, that the letter placed in his hand, crumpled, sodden, spotted with blood of the Servian dragoon, and partly defaced by the water of the Morava, was from Mary — from Mary Montgomerie; and oblivious of all else the world contained, he rushed away, breathlessly, to the solitude of his own tent, to peruse it.

Amid all it had undergone in transmission, the tinted paper on which it was written retained a subtle, but faint perfume. It was dated from Eaglescraig, and nearly a month back, and was sorely defaced and in some parts quite illegible.

A letter from Mary! he had opened it, hastily yet tenderly, with tremulous fingers —for his hands, that never shook when holding sword or pistol, shook now like aspen twigs, and as he held the paper before him a mist crept over his sight; for he knew that *her* hand had touched the paper and had written the lines that were there.

'My own little Mary!' he murmured; 'on earth I have nothing whereby to be worthy of you—and I have won and retained your love!'

He read on quickly and nervously, only to return to the beginning, and read over and over again; but in some places whole lines had been obliterated.

'My darling, oh my darling!' he read in one place, 'we have traced you at last, and learned from the newspapers that you

have escaped some awful peril, the details of which have not yet been made public. Write to us soon, and that you are coming home—write to the general, if you will. Oh, how happy he would be.'

He—what mystery—what change was here!

'And oh! my own Cecil, you . . . . . and how can I tell it to you, although I do so with joy, that now we know all—all about the giddiness that seized you at the ball, when talking with me, and how it was caused by Hew—Hew—the infamous and cruel, who, as he has since confessed in writing, when it was supposed he was dying, that he drugged your wine—unseen by all!'

Cecil paused and started to his feet, and passed a hand across his throbbing forehead.

'Drugged—oh, villain! — villain—vile trickster!' he exclaimed, while tears, hot and salt, came unbidden to his eyes.

'Sir Piers,' continued the letter, 'the general, as he will always have himself

called—the dear old thing!—went straight to the Horse Guards about it, and saw the commander-in-chief personally. You know his position, services, and influence; and so, dearest Cecil, you are again . . . . . '

'In the old corps,' said Cecil, as the letter here was again illegible, 'as the *Gazette* shows — Falconer — Montgomerie — why, and under which name is the remainder of my life to be passed?'

A whole paragraph followed, so sorely defaced that, with all his intense anxiety, Cecil could make nothing of it; and yet his future life might hinge on all that paragraph contained or detailed. But he failed to decipher it, save a word or two here and there—among them the names of 'father—mother—cousin—my own cousin,' and old John Balderstone was again and again referred to, in connection with some mysterious letters and documents he had found in some mysterious way to all appearance, and the whole bewildering passage concluded thus:

'Sir Piers deplores in his inmost heart

his harsh treatment of you and your poor parents.' (My parents!) 'And craves earnestly that you will return to your home—to Eaglescraig, and to *me*, dearest Cecil. He is telling me a long story about India, and letters going by *dawk* (whatever that may be) as I write, thus I scarcely know what I am putting upon paper . . . . Oh, how we all miss you, Cecil—I more than all; but you will soon be coming back to us now, thank God! Long and drearily pass the days—the mornings and evenings now at Eaglescraig; and I can but think of you, so blighted apparently in life, so lost to your own world, so ruined and so far away from me, in a land of peril. I write this to you on the merest chance, and in the prayerful hope that it may reach you; as we only learned your present terrible whereabouts from a newspaper paragraph.

'In Servia! oh, my love! what took you to such an unheard-of place as Servia? . . . . I never open the piano now; I dare not trust myself to sing.'

The sight of her writing sent ever

and anon a thrill to his heart, even as a touch of her gentle and delicate hand would have done.

'You will be delighted to learn that the quarrel or estrangement between your friend Leslie Fotheringhame and my dear Annabelle has all been explained away, and they are to be married in two months; but in the meantime Leslie has resolved . . . . and to please me . . . . in Servia. Ah, dearest Cecil, I thought such strange things only occurred in novels and melodramas as are occurring now to us! Only think of . . . .'

'Such strange things; to what does she refer? More obliteration!' sighed Cecil.

And now the letter ended, as such documents usually do, with many of the sweet, if childish, endearing terms so appreciated by lovers, and of which they never weary, as they are meant for their eyes alone.

How often Cecil read it, kissed it, and strove to fill up and draw deductions from the fragmentary passages, we shall not

pretend to say; but great food was given to him for speculation and marvel.

What was this miraculous discovery of John Balderstone? What event had produced such a beneficial effect upon everyone, on the general and himself in particular? How had it turned the heart of the general to him, and to 'his parents,' the ill-treatment of whom he deplored?

That the general, a soldier and man of the highest honour, smarting under a sense of Hew Montgomerie's treachery to an innocent man, had done as he had, by putting himself instantly in communication with the military authorities, and procuring his restoration, as the victim of a conspirator, Cecil could readily understand and be profoundly grateful for; but beyond that, all Mary's letter was to him—chaos!

Mental questions occurred to him in tiresome iteration.

In the fever of his impatience and doubts of all he wished elucidated, he drank some wine, but it seemed destitute of strength and coolness; he tasted some grapes, and

they failed to moisten his tongue; he lighted a choice cigar, but its soothing influence was gone.

Mary's letter, delicious though it was to receive, meant much more than he could extract from it. What was all this new mystery of which he had so suddenly become the centre? Would she write again—and when?

He must write to her; but where might she be at that precise time? At Eaglescraig, without doubt. Their love was one that had made them cleave unto each other in the teeth of all adverse circumstances, and hope naturally began to brighten anew in Cecil's heart, as he turned alternately from the puzzling notice in the *Gazette* to Mary's equally puzzling letter.

'Patience,' he would mutter; 'patience, and in a little time all will be made clear.'

But nevertheless he grew more impatient than ever.

How much of caressing tenderness, as well as information of importance, had been obliterated in Mary's letter by the

envious water of the Morava! When would he obtain a key, a clue to it all?

The soft, bright dreams that are so frequent in our earlier years, and form a part of our existence then, and which as time goes on become greyer, duller, and farther apart, and less tinted with sunshine, were coming back to Cecil's heart again, as he sat in his tent alone, and striving to think it all out—the new mystery that enveloped him.

He lost no time in writing to her in reply, a long and passionate letter; all the longer and more passionate that he had heard nothing of her for such a length of time, and had all the pent-up emotion of his heart to pour forth. Though he knew not what was meant by the discoveries to which she referred, he tendered through her all his thanks to the general for his kindness, and, in the exuberance of his joy, felt that he could even forgive Hew for the malice he had displayed and the terrible wrong he had done him. Home! he would start for home the moment he could hear from her

again, or get some details, some official letter of instructions, on the subject that perplexed him; and he deplored that as matters stood he could not just then, with honour, quit the army of the Morava. *Why,* he did not tell her — that the thunderclouds of a great battle were soon to darken the air around Deligrad!

The rumour spread rapidly, with many exaggerations, that the 'Herr Capitan' in Tchernaieff's own Dragoons was an officer in the British army, and it greatly enhanced the importance with which Cecil was viewed in the Servian camp.

If, ere he could leave that arena with honour, he was doomed to fall in battle now, it seemed to him hard to have to quit life so suddenly, when it became full of new value, and seemed more worth living!

Often had he reflected that he had not yet seen his thirtieth year, and that all the maturity of life spread out before him, and he felt that he had the spirit, energy, and courage to carve out name and fame for himself; but were either to be won in the

heartless struggle between Servia and Turkey? He had always feared not; and now, with a bright, glorious, and triumphant revulsion of feeling, he felt it mattered not. He had now a name and career elsewhere!

'I like this young fellow Falconer immensely,' said Stanley to Pelham, as they talked over his affairs after he left them; 'but I wish him well out of this camp and country too, especially if he has new and brighter prospects at home.'

'Well,' replied Pelham, who, like Stanley, was a handsome fellow, with much of that easy but indescribable air and manner of a man who has seen all the world of life has to show, 'he has been down on his luck—got court-martialled, it seems, in some row, and is now reinstated in his regiment and rank—squared it with the F.M. at the Horse Guards and all that.'

'With a girl he loved also—an heiress I expect; and yet he is going in for the last of this campaign.'

'What of that—why shouldn't he see the end of the fun?'

'What of it? This much! won't it be strange—very strange—if Count Palenka's weird prediction comes true, and the poor fellow gets bowled out after all?'

'By Jove! I never thought of that. What a fellow you are! But I don't believe in predictions of gipsies, jugglers, and things, don't you know.'

But there was much in the memory and the time—the memory of the count's dark grave face, his manner and expression—that impressed even the thoughtless Stanley; so he dropped the subject, and smoked on in silence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HEIGHTS OF DJUNIS.

IT was the morning of the 20th of October, and the bells of St. Nestor's Monastery were just tolling for matins, when the deep hoarse boom of the Turkish Krupp guns announced their attack upon Djunis, the key of the Servian position, some almost impregnable heights overlooking Deligrad and the valley of the Morava.

It was a wild and gusty morning. The chill breeze was sweeping fiercely through the groves and woodlands, casting their dark and fitful shadows in the morning sunshine on the ground beneath. There

the dead leaves were whirled in clouds to and fro, and the green blades of the dewy and yet untrodden grass shone like steel or silver in the sheen of the level sun.

Long ere this, the Servian and Russian troops—three thousand of the latter had joined only two months before — were under arms, and all moving into the various positions assigned to them; and the sombre columns, in the brown uniforms of Milano, or the dusky grey capotes of the Emperor, were marching in masses up the steeps and along the slopes, with their bayonets and accoutrements flashing incessantly in the sun, deploying, deepening, and extending, anon reducing their front as some natural obstruction came in the way, to deploy in front formation again, the tricolours waving in the wind, while occasionally the clear blast of a bugle was borne past on it.

Cecil's regiment, formed by squadrons of which he commanded the leading one, had all the cloaks rolled and strapped to the pommel of the saddles. Baggage, valises,

and all that might impede the men in action, were left in camp, and the edge and point of the sword alone were looked to for the work of the day, which was chiefly to support a battery of guns and go wherever they were wanted.

'My God, I thank Thee!' thought Cecil, with high and pure enthusiasm in his heart, as he leaped on his horse that morning; 'to-day, whatever may happen—whatever fate may befall me—I am again a Cameronian, a Queen's officer, one of the true old Cameronians who in every fight, from the days of Dunkeld to the fall of Magdala, have carried their colours with honour, and given place to none!'

And so he felt that it was as much in the character of a British officer, as one in the service of Milano Obrenovitch, he drew his sword in what was eventually to prove the last battle of the Servian war.

The cavalry brigade to which he belonged moved off by fours from the right of squadrons.

'*Shagaum-marche!* trot—*à levo!*—*nà*

préte!' (left wheel—forward!) followed, and the column began to descend the Krusevac road, moving to the left across a valley.

Here he passed the infantry corps of Pelham and Stanley, halted temporarily.

'A cigar, Falconer,' said the former, holding out his case.

'Thanks—acceptable indeed in this chill atmosphere.'

'If I get knocked on the head to-day—' began Pelham, who was rather a reckless fellow.

'A cheerful beginning!' said Stanley, sharply; 'I wish you would shut up, old man. But well, suppose you were so?'

'My tragic fate would be mourned sincerely, at least by many a sorrowful West-end trader, in whose books my later annals have been noted. But, ta, ta, Falconer—there goes our bugle. Advance!'

Shot dead by a Snider bullet in his heart, poor Pelham, within an hour after this, lay cold and stiff on the slope of the Djunis, while his regiment took up its position in front of the fast-advancing Turkish lines.

With the three days' fighting that now ensued we shall not trouble the reader, further than with that portion which cannot be omitted—the part that Cecil saw, and that he bore in it, with what befell him there.

Though Tchernaieff, on this day, placed the management of the troops chiefly in the hands of General Dochtouroff, he seemed to be ubiquitous, and was seen everywhere in rapid succession all over the Servian position, assisting in the placing of brigades here and there, on the most advantageous ground, and, as an officer who was present has recorded, 'he placed the troops exactly where they were most needed, for the Turks made their attack upon the very positions he had fixed upon.'

'Good-morning, Herr Capitan,' said he, as he passed Cecil's squadron, which had halted near some glassy steeps most difficult of ascent, in rear of the Servian position; 'but it seems to me that the enemy has got very correct information about all the points of our ground.'

'They have evidently been furnished

with a plan, excellency,' remarked a Russian aide-de-camp, whose breast was covered with Crimean and Khivan medals.

'A plan!' exclaimed Cecil; 'how can they have got it?'

'How, but through the agency of that scoundrel Guebhard, the renegade!' replied Tchernaieff, with a dark frown, and a Tartar-like gleam in his eyes; 'but the seven gates of hell are always open, and if he is here under fire, he may reach one of them to-night!'

'If not?'

'And if he ever falls into my hands, it will be an eye for an eye—a tooth for a tooth—his wretched life against the many lives lost to-day!'

He galloped on; the battle had begun in earnest now; fire and smoke enveloped the whole position that towered skyward; the booming of the heavy Krupp guns and the roar of rifle-musketry loaded the air, and amid it all the Grim Sergeant was calling fast his ghastly roll, while Cecil sat inactive, impatient in his saddle, and

longing to see some work cut out for the cavalry.

Wounded Servians and Russians came pouring past from the heights, smeared with blood and dust—the bronzed and battle-hardened veterans of old wars and the lad newly enrolled but a week before; some were binding up their wounds as they limped past, and some fell on the way, and lay there prone, dead or in a swoon, unheeded and untended—a painful spectacle to look upon in cold blood.

So closely was the attack of the position pressed, and so mixed up did the batteries of artillery and the brigades seem, that amid the sulphureous cloud that enveloped them it was difficult to know, sometimes, which were Servian and which were Turkish.

All day long around the steeps of the Djunis the cannon boomed and the rattle of musketry continued, and great was the slaughter everywhere. Whatever might have been the shortcomings of the Servians in previous battles, all fought

well and nobly then, and the din of battle all the livelong day rang between the peaks of the wooded mountains, with a thousand hollow reverberations, drowning every sound elicited by human enthusiasm, valour, suffering, or the heavy hand of coming death.

The smoke seemed to mingle with the clouds, especially towards sunset, where westward, beyond the mountain-tops, a red and tempestuous sun was setting, filling all the vast expanse with intense ruddy light, that threw up intervening objects in opaque and distinct outline.

On many a face that had been bright with youth and health in the morning the sunset fell now, and left it cold, white, and lifeless; the dusk drew on, and still the terrible work of slaughter went forward without ceasing.

As it deepened into utter gloom, the red, streaky, and incessant flashes from hundreds of cannon burst forth incessantly; the infantry sought each other's whereabouts by their mutual firing, pouring it

in almost at random, while on one side ever and anon burst forth the deep, hoarse 'Hurrah!' of the Muscovite and Slav, on the other the incessant and shrill high shout of 'Allah, Allah, hu!' till, as if by mutual consent, the contest ceased, and both armies lay down, weary and worn, to endure hunger, thirst, and cold, on the ground where they had fought, and surrounded by all the agony and horrors of their mutual carnage.

Many lay down on that night on the slopes of the Djunis who never rose again.

Cecil passed it rolled in his cloak beside his charger, with a stone for a pillow; but sleep was a stranger to his eyes, and amid the incessant cries and moans of the wounded, who streamed past rearward by twos, threes, or even scores at a time, he strove to think of Mary's letter and all it suggested, to render him oblivious, for a time, of all his terrible surroundings.

A sergeant of his troop shared with him the contents of a flask of *raki*, fiery stuff,

but very acceptable under the circumstances, for Cecil was as great a favourite with his Servian troopers as he had been with the Cameronians; and the act of the sergeant—whilom a poor copper-miner in the mountains—recalled to his memory the faith and generosity of his old Cameronian servant, Tommy Atkins, on the last night he was under the same roof with the dear old regiment.

Cecil knew not how the fight had gone on the summit of the position, but when morning dawned, among those who were still straggling, crawling, and limping down from it came a man in a scarlet tunic. Scarlet! The sight of the familiar colour made Cecil's heart leap. The wearer, who was severely wounded, proved to be a new aide-de-camp of Tchernaieff's, a lieutenant of the 1st Hussars of the Russian Imperial Guard, whose uniform is like the British.

He informed Cecil that a portion of the position, named the Crevet Plateau, which Dochtouroff had retaken from the Turks,

had afterwards fallen again into the hands of the enemy; but he had sworn to retake it or die there, and after a terrible conflict, in which men perished by companies around him, he had failed to do so, though his troops had got into that state of rage or frenzy which the French term *acharnement.*

With dawn the work of death began again, and Cecil's troop, with some other cavalry, began, by a circuitous route, to ascend the position. Ere long shot began to fall and shells to burst among them, scattering wounds, suffering, and death; but so much were the whole heights involved in smoke that he could see little of what was going on, and knew less of the great game that was being played, though the hill on which he was ordered to halt commanded a view of the valleys on both sides.

A regiment of Russian infantry, far away on the right, held with resolute bravery a post assigned it by Dochtouroff, and the Turkish masses with their scarlet

fezzes and green standards, and their incessant shout of 'Allah!' seemed to hurl their fury against it again and again in vain. On the left the smoke from three villages, set on fire by them, rolled along the valley and veiled everything. In one part of the field a Russian regiment, which had expended the last of its cartridges, deliberately 'stood at ease' under the Turkish fire, perishing where it was posted, rather than lose honour by falling back!

Thick lay the dead and thicker the wounded on every hand, and the medley of sounds that went up from the Crevet Plateau and the eminences around it was appalling; and the evening of the second day was drawing on.

Suddenly General Dochtouroff, pale and excited, but with flashing eyes, dashed up to where Cecil was at the head of his squadron, and sharply reining in his horse on the curb, said:

'A brigade of guns is getting into position to attack the flank of yonder

Turkish column on the left. At the hazard of your life you will support the guns!'

Dochtouroff then galloped away, and, as it proved eventually, Cecil never saw him again.

'Here come the artillery!' cried a voice, as the guns came thundering to the front —all Russian, painted green, guns and carriages alike. Along the slope of the Djunis heights the brigade came in column at full speed, withdrawn from some other position to act with effect at the point indicated. Crushing many a dead body, and splashing through pools of blood, they went in wild career, the drivers using whip and spur with a will; the fence of a flax-field was swept away like a gossamer web, as the guns rushed to the front—six horses to each gun and limber, three riders to each gun.

Over vineyard walls, fallen trees, through laurel bushes, every horse straining at the gallop, every driver lashing his team and goring with the spurs, while yelling, 'Do-

bro! dobro! hurrah! hurrah!' they made a wonderfully impressive sight.

Sometimes the guns bounded up eighteen inches or more, as the iron-bound wheels went over some rock or obstruction, but no man lost his seat, and no horse failed in its pace—eight guns, eight tumbrils, eighty horses, and a hundred men, all rushing on for life and death to obey Dochtouroff, and get into position, the cavalry galloping in their rear, and from a column of march right in front, as they wheeled up into line, they formed to the left.

The guns were slewed round with their muzzles to the enemy's line, the limbers were cast off, drawn rearward, and in hoarse Russian the word was given to fire. 'Boom, boom, boom!' rang along the front, shrouding all in smoke, and making terrible havoc in the ranks of the Turkish brigade; but still went up the cry of 'Allah, Allah, hu!' the concluding word of the Muezzin's call to prayer.

The guns were not charged with shot,

but short-fuse shell, and the roar of each explosion veiled for a moment all the other sounds of battle. The explosions were awful, and fast fell the fezzes to earth, the corpses so mangled as to be scarcely recognised as human; yet the brave Turks, incited by their officers, full of military and religious ardour, seeing, perhaps, the glories of Paradise opening before them and the dark-eyed girls waving their scarfs of green, closed nobly in, and were making a forward movement as if to charge the guns, still shouting, 'Allah, Allah, hu!' And now came the time for Cecil to go to work, to get clear of the brigade of cannon, and form in front to charge, while the latter were reloaded; and even after all he had undergone there now boiled up in his heart the 'rapture of the strife,' as Attila is said to have termed the fierce excitement of battle.

'By half troops to the right turn—left wheel—forward—trot!' were his orders.

'By half troops left wheel — form squadron!' he cried, raising himself in his

stirrups and brandishing his sword; 'forward—*gallop*—CHARGE!'

By this time, the Turkish infantry were confusedly endeavouring to form square over the piles of dead and dying who had fallen before the cannon.

Ere the final word had left his lips, Cecil had seen that his squadron had advanced at a brisk trot to within fifty yards of the enemy's front—that there were no closing and crowding of his files to impede the free action of man and horse, and that the former kept the latter well in hand, pressing forward by leg and spur when necessary; and in splendid order, ere the square was formed, with the force of a locomotive, the troopers were sword in hand among them, hewing them down on right and left, the hurrahs of the Servians mingling with the yells of the Turks.

'Fours about!' sounded the shrill trumpet, and away wheeling off to the right and left, while the Turks were still struggling to form square, he left the guns uncovered, and once more the plunging

fire—grape and canister this time—went with serpent-like hiss through the swaying mass—tearing off legs, arms, and heads, laying the dead and the dying in swathes above each other.

As he again formed his squadron, breathless now, in rear of the guns, Cecil could see through the whirling and eddying smoke that it was no longer a line, but a mob of men who were in front—a mob whose shrieks, screams, and shouts rent the evening air, while the muskets and bayonets seemed to sway helplessly to and fro.

Another round of these terrible guns from right to left, given with such force and rapidity that the hot guns almost leaped from the ground with the concussion, and the Turks in that quarter gave way *en masse*, just as the fiery sun went down beyond the dark mountain ranges.

Again Cecil led on his troopers, who had been straining like greyhounds in the leash—on over the ground an acre and more of which was covered by men mutilated

every way—corpses struck by four, five, six bullets—yea, in some instances by a whole charge of canister—and where every blade of grass was dyed red—on to the charge once more, and, as there was no time to take prisoners, a terrible havoc was made—a havoc at which his heart, even in the thrill of what he thought was victory, began to sicken; but he had received his orders to support the guns, and nobly had he done so.

At that point the strife was nearly over, when a cry of agony escaped the lips of Cecil, as a bullet—the last shot of some wounded man—pierced his chest like a red-hot sword-blade, and he fell forward on the neck of his horse, clutching wildly at the reins the while; at the same moment another Turk who lay wounded—an officer apparently—by one slash of his sharp Damascus sabre, all but disembowelled the animal, which uttered a snorting cry, and wheeling round, quitted the field at a mad and infuriated gallop, with his helpless rider clinging to the pommel of

the saddle. No one could stop or intercept its headlong career, and in less than a minute the luckless commander vanished from the eyes of his squadron!

Was Palenka's prediction about to come true after all?

Cecil had thought the field was won, yet it was not entirely so. Had the winning thereof depended on the fiery valour of one man, Dochtouroff had been victor. At the head of two hundred Russians he charged with the bayonet right into the centre of the Turkish main attack, with such fury that ere the rifles crossed the enemy wheeled about and fled, and he saved the principal position—that of Djunis; 'but Krupp guns, Snider rifles, and better trained troops, in far superior numbers, had done their work, and Servia was beaten!'

During the three days' fighting, the latter lost not less than nine thousand soldiers, in killed, wounded, and missing; and of three thousand Russians who were in the field, only seven hundred remained untouched at sunset on the third day.

The losses of the Turks were never precisely known, but they must have been terrible, as they were the attacking force, and had assailed well-chosen positions that were deemed impregnable.

In Russia and abroad, bluff old Tchernaieff was blamed for recklessness in his tactics, and doubtless he made mistakes which ended in failures. 'And then,' says Captain Salusbury, in his work on those wars, 'it must not be forgotten that he always expected reinforcements which never came. And again it is to be noted that he had to operate with eighty thousand of not the very best troops in a country that required, to command success, two hundred thousand well-trained and thoroughly disciplined soldiers. There is no doubt that the men I saw under fire were a far inferior lot to those who fought in the early part of the war.'

When the battle—the last of the strife—was fairly over, a requiem for the dead was solemnly held, according to the Russian ritual, in a tent upon the field, where

numbers of ladies, the wives—and in too many sorrowful instances the widows—of Russian officers were gliding about like angels of mercy, ministering to the wants of the wounded. While leaving Dochtouroff to hold the position, Tchernaieff withdrew to the camp at Deligrad.

Meanwhile where was Cecil Falconer, or Montgomerie as he had been learning to call himself now?

CHAPTER XIX.

WOUNDED.

AWAY rearward from the field, out of all range of musketry and cannon, Cecil's maddened horse—maddened by the agony of a mighty wound—swept at a furious rate, while he—blinded with equal agony and unable to guide or control it—clung to his holsters or the pommel of the saddle, as it bore him on he knew not whither; but it rushed in its wild career down a wooded valley, actually treading on its own entrails by the way, till it fell heavily with its rider in the depth of a coppice, and there both lay, to all appearance, dying, unseen by mortal eyes.

Down sank the sun beyond those mountains which are spurs of the Balkans, a globe of fiery flame in an angry and cloudy sky; the day was done, and with it many a human life!

Cecil fainted soon after being thrown from his horse, but ere he did so there came over him a strange dreamy wonder of how the battle was progressing, or rather how the tide of war was going, for in the distance he could still hear the cannon on the heights of Djunis.

Anon the din of the battle passed away, and on his partially recovering consciousness the stillness of death surrounded the place where Cecil lay helpless beside his dead horse—a stillness broken only by the voice of the *vila*, or when the damp dewy wings of the night-birds brushed his cheek when whirring past him.

The snow-clad summits of the lofty hills that overlook the valley of the Morava on one side, and that of the Timok on the other, shone pale and white in the light of the uprisen moon.

At times, not far from him, he could hear the snort of a wild boar or the cry of a wolf, scared by the recent din of battle perhaps; and now he became conscious of the rush of a mountain runnel that ran near him, but which, sorely athirst though he was, loss of blood had rendered him too feeble to reach.

Close by him, with holsters, housing and gilded martingale, lay the dead body of his caparisoned horse, the blood of which was freely mingled with his own.

The hours of the night passed slowly on. The moon waned; but the stars grew brighter. Tender thoughts of Mary and all their mutual past, and of the future which now too probably would never be, came to him at times; and in imagination he more than once thought that her voice—but curiously mingled with that of Margarita—came to his almost death-drowsy ear.

Cold and clammy fell the dew of night on his white and upturned face; his breathing was long, deep, and laboured, for

the ball that so nearly finished him had deeply pierced his breast. He lay well-nigh lifeless. Would he ever be found—on the farthest skirts of the field as he was—till too late; till death had come first and claimed his own, ere the birds of the air, the wolves and wild dogs made a banquet of him?

The moaning of the night-wind in the giant pines was heard at times; but it brought no sound, save the snarling voices of the beasts of prey, busy perhaps elsewhere. The flow from his wound had stopped; he must have perished otherwise; a species of bloody paste had sealed up the wound for a time; but Cecil's mind had become a chaos now, and he could remember nothing but the agony in his chest and the intensity of his thirst—an intensity to which the murmur of the cool runnel close by added tantalisation.

Would a cooling draught ever moisten his lips again? Even the heavily falling dew had failed to do so.

At last he became alive to all the dire

realities of the situation—that he was lying in a lonely and untrodden spot, done nigh unto death; far from aid or succour, unable even to drive away the insects that, when morning came, would be battening in his blood, and when his sole watcher would be the greedy and expectant carrion crow. It would be so. He would die in solitude, and never find a grave until even that might be found when too late!

Around him, at times, the solitude was awful.

He must have slept or been senseless, for after a certain space he found the sun shining above the tree-tops, and some of the ravenous kites, that were croaking and wheeling above him in circles, had already begun to settle on the body of his horse, and dig their sharp beaks into it—something of life and volition in his face alone preventing them from assailing him, though they eyed him greedily, viciously, and askance from time to time.

A cry of great horror escaped him. Then his wound burst forth afresh, and he

became completely senseless and oblivious of all around him.

After all—after all he had undergone, was he at last to find an unknown grave under the eternal shadow of this vast Servian forest!

As the third day of the battle was drawing to a close, an enterprising Briton, well mounted and armed with holster-pistols at his saddle, was galloping with headlong speed along the road that led from the north towards the camp at Deligrad; but evening fell ere he reached the scene of operations, and only in time to see the last red flashes of the loud artillery pale out in the darkness on the lofty heights of Djunis.

The heavy odour of gunpowder pervaded all the air, and every yard of the way now was encumbered by wounded men.

'I thought to have seen some of the sport,' muttered the horseman, who was a well-built soldier-like fellow, with a heavy moustache, and though clad in a

coarse and warm tweed suit, wore a handsome Indian helmet secured by a gilt chain under his firm and resolute-looking chin; 'and now I have only arrived in time to be in at the death—the death of thousands, no doubt!' he added with a sigh; 'I wonder which way the day has gone, and who has won—Slav or Turk—not that it matters very much to me. A three-days' battle! Pray God that *he* may have escaped in them!'

In the moonlight he reached the entrance to the camp at Deligrad; but there, and over all the ground that lay between it and the two wayside hospitals above which the white flags with red crosses were always flying, there were crowds of wounded and dying men, whose moans, cries, and supplications loaded the air, and made the heart of the stranger sicken.

At the entrance to the camp the word *Stoe!* (halt!) was shouted in his ear, and he was stopped by the guard which was under arms, and allowing only ambulance waggons and men in uniform to pass—and the

stranger had neither the parole nor countersign.

'Are you in the service of Prince Milano?' asked the officer commanding, in French.

'No.'

'You are a traveller, then?'

'Yes—monsieur—every man travels, nowadays,' replied the other, tossing away his cigar. He then inquired anxiously for the head-quarters or whereabouts of General Tchernaieff and his staff; but no one could say whether the gallant old Muscovite had, or had not yet left the heights of Djunis.

'Have you come from Belgrade?' asked the Servian officer, raising his voice, for the number and cries of the wounded were increasing every moment.

'Yes—monsieur—on the spur.'

'Then, perhaps you have despatches from the King.'

'What king?'

'The devil! here is a fellow who never

heard of the King of Servia—Milano Obrenovitch!'

'A spy!' said several voices, in Servian and German.

'Spy, be hanged!' exclaimed the stranger.

'We have taken one already, and hanged he shall be on the morrow—the rascal Guebhard!' said the Servian captain, exultingly.

'I know nothing about all this—I have my passports, which show that I am an officer in her Britannic Majesty's service.'

'Bravo! can I serve you?' asked a wounded offier, who was limping past, supported by a soldier.

'Thank God, here is a fellow who speaks English!' exclaimed the stranger to Stanley, for the wounded man was the latter, come down from the heights with a ball in his leg.

'And you wish to see the general?'

'I wish rather to see one who is, or was, on his staff—Cecil Falconer, a brother officer of mine. Allow me to introduce myself—Captain Fotheringhame, of the 26th Foot!'

For he it was—brave, honest, and friendly Leslie Fotheringhame, who had obtained leave, and come all the way to Servia in search of his absent comrade.

'Ah—the old Cameronians!' said the other, as they shook hands. 'I am Captain Stanley, late Foot Guards, and now, for my sins, Major of the 5th Servians. I know Falconer well. He was with the cavalry that went forward to support a brigade of guns. Since noon, I have seen and heard nothing of him—sorry to say so. I am enduring agony with my wound. We have had a terrible day of it. I came here in search of a new sensation; and, by Jove, I have got it—this ball in my leg! The carnage has been great—and I doubt if poor Falconer has escaped—all the more that—that——'

Stanley paused, and hesitated.

'What?'

'His death was curiously predicted.'

'Predicted!' repeated Fotheringhame in a tone of incredulous surprise; 'by whom?'

'A brother aide-de-camp—an officer of rank.'

'The deuce—do you, an Englishman, think such things possible?'

'When you have been a few months in Servia you will think any devilry possible,' replied Stanley, with a grimace as his wound stung him; 'I wish you every success in your inquiries for Falconer, and I shall be glad to hear of them from yourself at my hut in the lines. Make your inquiries where the cavalry charged on the right front of the position, and—till we meet again—good-bye.'

And with his head reclining on the shoulder of the Servian soldier who supported him, Stanley, who was evidently in great pain, limped away, while Fotheringhame, knowing not exactly what to think of all this—for, though he might have scouted any predictions at another time, he could not fail to be impressed with doubt and dread, from the terrible sights and sounds on every hand—took his way towards the part of the field indicated by

Stanley, walking his horse onward, and upward, from the camp at haphazard in the darkness of a now moonless night.

We need neither refer to fully, nor attempt to describe, the endless scenes of horror that met the eye of Leslie Fotheringhame, as he stumbled on vaguely over the starlit field of battle—the arena of the three-days' conflict round the fatal heights of Djunis—scenes which redoubled in their harrowing intensity as the cold grey dawn stole in over the faces of the dead and the dying.

By industriously prosecuting his inquiries among the wounded and the men of the ambulance corps who were conveying them, he discovered the exact ground where the brigade of guns had gone into action, and Cecil's squadron had charged. The brown uniforms of 'Tchernaieff's Own' were lying there thick, but thicker lay the awful heaps of the Osmanlies, whom the fuse-shells, grape, and canister had mowed down as a scythe mows the grass.

From a sergeant of Cecil's regiment—a

sergeant who spoke German, and was the same good fellow who had shared with him the flask of *raki* on the night before the battle—he learned how his friend had been wounded, as well as his horse, and how the latter had borne him out of the field, and been lost to sight in the ravine that opened away deep down on the rear of the right flank.

The prediction spoken of by Stanley seemed terribly near verification now, as Fotheringhame searched all the woody ravine, with his heart heavy as lead, for he remembered the farewell messages of Mary Montgomerie, and how, when he left her, the kisses of intense gratitude she bestowed on his cheeks were scarcely less tender than those of his own Annabelle.

He searched all the valley, but beneath the deep shadow of the pines, and amid all the wild undergrowth of years, he could see no sign of man or horse—only some croaking kites wheeling lazily in circles—and he turned away, thinking that it was among the blood-splashed wards of

the hospitals and ambulance tents, or by the pits where the dead were to be interred, his sorrowful search could only be prosecuted now.

CHAPTER XX.

SAVED!

WE have said that when the kites began to assail his dead horse close by him, a cry of great horror escaped the lips of Cecil. Feeble though it was, it reached the ears of Leslie Fotheringhame, just as the latter was in the act of turning, sadly, to leave the wooded hollow.

Moving his horse round a clump of wild laurel bushes, he saw a caparisoned charger lying dead, and near it a man in uniform, to all appearance dead also—he lay so motionless and still.

Fotheringhame drew near. In the

strange brown Servian uniform, with his face pale as death could have made it, and obscured by blood and mud, Leslie Fotheringhame had some difficulty in recognising the young friend he had come so far to find—in knowing again the once happy and merry face that, in times past, had been so often opposite his own at the jovial mess-table; but when he did so, a half-smothered ejaculation escaped him, and a great joy, mingled with greater pity, gushed up in his breast, as he leaped from his horse and knelt beside him.

Cecil's eyes were sightless now, and, though half-closed, fixed glassily on vacancy.

'Cecil — Cecil Falconer!' exclaimed Fotheringhame, as he took in his the cold and passive hand; but the sufferer heard him not. 'Life yet, thank God!' he added, as he felt Cecil's pulse, and then his heart, but withdrew his fingers covered with blood.

Folding the broad leaf of an acanthus into the form of a cup, he brought therein

some cool water from the adjacent runnel, and Cecil drank thirstily again and again; and then his head sank back, with the eyes still unclosed, yet sightless—seeing nothing and recognising nothing.

Fotheringhame took a flask of brandy from one of his holsters, and poured some, with water, between the lips of Cecil, whose head he pillowed on his arm.

Partially restored by this, after a time the sufferer attempted to speak; but his utterances were unintelligible, and his head sank lower: his eyes closed now, and his thoughts were wandering—wandering away to Mary, and to the old regiment in feverish dreams—dreams, perhaps, suggested by the voice of Fotheringhame.

The latter found that the wound in the chest was deep, for there the ball had lodged, and not a moment was to be lost in having it attended to. Galloping up to the plateau, he soon procured some of the ambulance corps; a stretcher was improvised by a blanket and a couple of muskets, and Cecil was speedily placed in one of the

waggons for conveyance to the camp at Deligrad; but so great was his agony, that the vehicle had to be stopped from time to time, and the contents of Fotheringhame's flask, by giving him artificial strength, alone prevented him from fainting.

Yet strange visions haunted him. Out of the gathering mists of death, as he deemed them, he thought he saw the face and heard the voice of his old friend and comrade; and with them the voice of Margarita, singing the sweet soft song of 'The Wishes.'

Once he seemed to see distinctly the face of Fotheringhame, and his eyes dilated with something of wonder and alarm in them. Then he closed them, muttering, 'Another dream,' believing it was an unreality.

And now, as the ambulance waggon reached the road that led from the camp to Deligrad, in the open ground Fotheringhame saw some thousand troops, horse, foot, and artillery, massed in columns,

forming three sides of a hollow square, and his soldier-eye examined critically the brown ranks of the Servians, and then those in Russian green, as the bayonets were fixed, and flashed in the morning sun as the arms were shouldered.

The fourth or open side of the square was occupied by preparations for an execution, for there stood a man tied to a post, and before him a firing-party, composed of twelve Bulgarian volunteers. Deadly pale looked the culprit, who was stripped to his shirt and baggy red breeches—Mattei Guebhard, for it was he—taken prisoner in the late action, by Stanley's regiment—baffled, checkmated, standing there in dishonour, the centre of thousands of stern and unpitying eyes.

To this end had his life come!

Discipline alone kept the troops silent; but the crowds of Servian peasantry and the camp-followers hooted and yelled at him, loading the air with opprobrious cries. No braggart was he then.

He made the sign of the cross repeatedly

in the Greek manner, mechanically, or in a spirit of latent superstition, for religion he had none.

Fotheringhame heard only that he was a deserter and spy, yet, checking his horse, he looked on the scene with breathless interest, little knowing how prominent a part the culprit had recently played in the life of his friend Cecil.

In attendance upon him was the old village pope of Palenka in his bell-shaped black felt hat with long tabs floating behind, and a venerable beard spread over the breast of his glittering vestments. Guebhard smoked a cigar, and for a time preserved a bearing of indifference, till the priest withdrew and the words of command were given to the Bulgarians, who cocked their rifles, and his eyes were bound. Then, unable to stand erect from emotion or craven fear, his knees gave way under him and his head fell forward, the lashings which bound him to the post alone supporting him partially.

The death-volley rang sharply in the

morning air; soon all was over, and the troops were defiling past where the shattered corpse hung at the post, their colours flying and drums beating merrily, and from thence into their lines.

By this time Fotheringhame had conveyed Cecil to the hospital, and with difficulty secured the attendance of a surgeon, for all the medical men had their hands full.

The sights and sounds in the wards were more appalling than anything he had seen on the field; and the surgeons, with their coats off, shirt-sleeves rolled up, and red to the elbows in blood, looked like veritable butchers.

'Horrible work this, doctor,' said he to a fat, fussy little German; 'cutting off legs and arms with knife and saw, quietly and in cold blood.'

'*Ach Himmel!* you think it is better done with a sabre, while yelling like a devil broke loose!'

'In a charge—yes; but please look to my friend.'

Cecil was now stretched on a pallet, his

tunic unbuttoned, and with his breast a mass of blood, a piteous sight he looked. A second doctor now came, and while they conferred in German, Fotheringhame felt his heart stand still.

'*Mein Herr*,' whispered one, looking up, 'there will be a crisis soon.'

'When ?'

'When we have the bullet out.'

'I trust you have hope ?'

'There is always hope while there is life,' replied the doctor, turning aside while he carefully wiped a probe; 'but he has lost so much blood, and is so low, that if he rallies it will be little short of a miracle.'

The other doctor deemed the case a hopeless one, and a cry nearly escaped Fotheringhame when he saw Cecil's form convulsed by a spasm as the bullet was extracted, and a swoon came over him.

'If he should die in my hands—poor Cecil !' thought the kind-hearted fellow, in great misery of mind; 'or if I am only taking him home to die ! That prediction about a violent death, what did it mean ?

Who the devil made it? Looks too deuced likely to happen!'

And so, while the soft and tender hands of the Sisters of Charity did all those little offices about Cecil that no wife, mother, or sister in blood could have done more ably or kindly, Fotheringhame smoked a cigar close by, full of thought and anxiety, while a long and deep sleep fell upon the patient, a sleep that was worth a hundred nostrums.

'Poor fellow! he is down in his luck, certainly,' thought Fotheringhame; ''gad, I shall rejoice to hear when the doctors think him safe round the corner, and we may start for home.'

When sense came completely back to Cecil, he knew not where he was, nor for some hours thereafter did he exactly comprehend all that had lately happened to him and passed around him; he had lost so much blood, and been thereby so giddy, weak, drowsy, and insensible.

His first recollections were of the battle

—of supporting the field-battery, and the charges he had led ere he fell; then the night in the woody hollow—his thirst and the kites hovering over him!

Now he was in a handsome, lofty, and airy room, and on a pretty French couch; a soft flower-scented breeze came through an open window, the hangings of which were partly drawn; and he had also a sense of a woman flitting noiselessly about him, and by her plain black dress and the white band with the red cross on the left arm, her crimped cap and spotless white apron, he recognised in her one of the German nurses or Sisters of Charity, who, the moment she caught his eye and saw him move, gave him a cooling and refreshing drink, glad to find symptoms of recovery in a poor sufferer whose mutterings alone had given her a clue to his wants, while she had felt her heart touched by the utterance of the ever-recurring name of 'Mary'; but her work was nearly done now, as she had nursed him back to health and something like strength.

'Where am I?' he asked, with a husky voice.

'In Belgrade, *mein Herr.*'

'Belgrade! with whom?'

'Friends; kind friends, who will take care of you now that the horrible war is all over.'

In a well-hung carriage procured by Fotheringhame from General Tchernaieff, Cecil, all unknown to himself, had been conveyed more than a hundred miles from the field of battle and from the crowded and pestilential hospitals thereby, and was now comfortably quartered in the Krone or La Couronne Hotel at Belgrade.

Cecil was greatly bewildered by hearing that he was in the capital of Servia, and was disposed to ask more questions; but his nurse told him that he must be patient, adding, while the tender light of a sweet and womanly soul lit up her eyes:

'And you must not talk, it is bad for your chest, Herr Captain; drink more of this—you cannot! Then I must feed you with a spoon.'

'You?'

'Yes,' and tenderly the blooming little fräulein raised his head on her soft arm, and made him partake of the medicated food the doctor had ordered.

'Now go to sleep,' said she; 'sleep and feed—feed and sleep, you naughty boy, and we soon shall have you in your saddle once more.'

He dozed off again, but tossed restlessly on his pillow, as dreams came to him now more distinctly than before.

'He has youth and strength, and pure good blood—at least, what is left of it,' said the doctor, smilingly, to honest Fotheringhame, who was always hovering near; 'I believe in these—and such nurses as you, Sister Gretchen, with plenty of jellies and beef-tea—*ja—ja!*'

'Bravo, old fellow! you've turned the corner at last!' was the exclamation of Fotheringhame to Cecil, some days after this.

'You think so, dear Leslie,' replied

Cecil, in a weak voice, as he held out a wasted hand to his friend; 'but I only fear that I am getting near the end now—the end of a sad and broken life!'

'Now don't talk this way, or I'll be off like a bird and leave you!' said Fotheringhame.

'How shall I ever be able to thank you for coming all the distance you have done, to look after a poor waif like me? And but for your so miraculously finding me, I must have perished—inevitably perished!'

'There was nothing very miraculous in it. I traced out the position, and by chance lighted upon an old sergeant, who showed me the way your horse had gone; I followed the track, and, thank God, heard your cry.'

'Another moment, that odious kite would have torn out my eyes. Oh, Heavens! I shall never forget, my dear Leslie, the horror of that helpless time! After leading my fellows to the last charge in support of the guns, I have no recollec-

tion of anything—I must have gone down like a shot!'

Fotheringhame thought that now the time was come when he could safely enlighten Cecil as to the change in his fortune, and elucidate the mysterious portions of Mary's half-obliterated letter—that he was Sir Piers's heir—her cousin, and that the obnoxious Hew had disappeared from the family group; and, as may easily be supposed, great was Cecil's bewilderment and wonder to hear of a discovery—a *dénouement* so singular.

Mary's cousin—the general's heir—heir to Eaglescraig and his baronetcy! Could such things be?

He had much to inquire about again and again, and much to think of deeply now; and sedulously as his mother, in her widowhood and in her pride of heart, had kept all knowledge of his family, and even of his name, from him, innumerable things that occurred in their wandering life took a tangible form now, and the cause of many an emotion and occurrence, that had puzzled

him in the past time became apparent enough; and in his grateful heart a great pity mingled with the yearning memory of his mother.

'And now about yourself and Annabelle Erroll,' asked Cecil on one occasion.

'Only that we are to be married as soon as we get back, so make haste and get well, old fellow!' was the laughing reply of Fotheringhame.

The war in Servia was virtually over now; and even had it not been so, Cecil could have resigned now with honour, as Stanley did, who was also *en route* for England, with several other volunteers.

An armistice had been signed on the day after the last battle, and the sword was sheathed in the valley of the Morava, and Milano IV. remains still prince, but not king, of Servia and Bosnia.

With the struggle between Russia and Turkey, on the soil of Servia, Cecil had done. Of what the former for ages has looked forward to—the destruction of the

latter—a prophecy of extreme antiquity foretells the accomplishment—a prophecy uttered when, or by whom, no man knows; but eight centuries ago it was read on the brazen horse of an equestrian statue, then ages old, when brought to Constantinople from Antioch.

Though weak from the effects of his terrible wound, Cecil was recovering fast; while love and fortune seemed to smile alike upon him; and to him and Fotheringhame pleasant indeed was their journey from Semlin, on the famous Danube, to Monaco, so famous in the Hungarian annals for its terrible battle, and from thence homeward by Vienna and the Netherlands.

CHAPTER XXI.

'THE END CROWNS ALL.'

A YELLOW autumn moon in a deep blue sky was pouring a flood of light over the old 'Queen of the North,' throwing the giant shadows of her rock-built fortress far athwart the dark valley below, and of the ridgy masses of the old city of mediæval times, towering high above the long white terraces of the New Town, when Leslie Fotheringhame thankfully deposited his charge—the poor waif whom he had found dying on the bank of the Morava—in one of the many stately hotels in the vicinity of Princes Street; we say thankfully, for

though Cecil was recovering, he was still weak enough to render the prediction of Count Palenka something unpleasant to remember.

'Now, Cecil, a bumper of Moselle, as a refresher after our long day's journey, and then I go to meet those at the railway, whom, I suppose, you will be right glad to see!' said Fotheringhame, ere he laughingly took his departure in a cab.

Cecil drained the wine, and looked around him, half fearing that he might be dreaming—and that the spacious room, the brilliant gaselier, the Turkey carpet, the tiger-skin before the stately white marble mantelpiece, the great mirror in which his own pallid face and eyes unnaturally bright with long suffering were reflected, might pass away. How much had he seen of misery, how much bitterness of thought, and how much peril had he undergone since last he had surroundings such as these!

Could it all be real, that within an hour, perhaps, Mary's hands would be in his?

He approached one of the tall windows and looked out upon the night, and on the well-known scene, with all its familiar sights and sounds, with the moonlight streaming over steeple, tower, and dome—St. Giles's crown—the castle on its rock, so high in air that its lights seemed to mingle with the stars, and from it came the sound of the Cameronian drums, awaking the echoes of turret and battery—the drums he would soon be following again; but the heavy sigh of supreme gratitude that escaped him reminded him by a pang of the wound in his chest, and he reeled giddily.

'I would that they were come,' he muttered. 'I knew not till now that I was still so weak,' he added, as he looked at his wasted hands.

The shadow or outline of a man's figure standing in the broad iron balcony without the window now fell suddenly on a window-blind. Cecil drew it up—threw open the sash abruptly, and found himself face to face with—Hew—Hew watching him!

He seemed shabby in dress and dissipated—his hair and moustache untrimmed; his eyes were bleary, his nose pimply, and his whole air and aspect were those of a sorely broken-down tippler.

Cecil, in utter repugnance, recoiled a pace, and an ugly expression flashed in the shifty and bilious-like eyes of Hew.

'You, here?' exclaimed Cecil.

'Yes--and I saw your arrival.'

'Are you living in this hotel, Hew?'

'Well—I am, in a manner of way,' he replied, sulkily: 'I am the billiard-marker!'

'The billiard-marker? Have you fallen so far?'

'Yes,' he replied, with a fierce grimace.

'You did me an infamous and awful injury, Hew, as your own confession has shown; but,' added Cecil, in the generosity of his nature and under the impulses of the time, 'I forgive it all now.'

'Thank you—how good!' sneered the other.

'Let us forget our feud—your feud,

rather; but never let me look upon your face again.'

'Only children and fools, they say, forget.'

'And what have you to remember, pray?'

'All that you have come between, and me.'

'I have only come to my own.'

'Curse you!' exclaimed Hew, hoarsely and bitterly.

'You are a rancorous fellow—begone instantly!' replied Cecil, as he closed the window; and, feeling somewhat exhausted by the emotions this most unexpected interview stirred within him, he threw himself upon a sofa to await the return of Fotheringhame with those who were to accompany him, and after a time he forgot all about Hew and his close vicinity.

Weary and weak, a drowsiness encouraged by the warmth of the room stole over him, and, in spite of his efforts to keep awake, he fell into a drowsy state between sleeping and waking; but his mind was

full of Mary, who would soon be with him —the real and imaginary so blended in his vision, but indistinctly, with that vacuity which makes the dreamer sigh when his fancies have become a memory.

Hew was still watching without, and unnoticed by the crowds that passed and repassed in the lighted street below. His heart was full of the bitterest rancour, envy, and rage. His mind was full of a species of madness—but a madness with a great deal of method and cunning in it.

He peeped in from time to time at the sleeper, with a gleam of intense malice in his stealthy eyes. Cecil was alone and unattended, and he lay there apart from all, and quite unheeded amid the bustle of the great hotel.

'There is not much life left in the fellow,' muttered Hew; 'a good shake—a squeeze of the windpipe, or a few more drops in his drink than I gave him at the ball, and Eaglescraig is mine!'

The door of the apartment was shut—if he would act, it must be done promptly.

He would enter and leave the room by the French window, and after all was over, leave the balcony by another apartment, and repair at once to his usual scene of work, the billiard-room.

A blindness and giddiness, with a great terror, came over him for a moment; as one in a dream, he looked at the crowds passing below—the stars above; gave a last glance to assure himself that his avenue of escape was clear, and then with a heart beating wildly, fired as it was by envy, avarice, malice, and all uncharitableness, he again drew near the window of Cecil's room and laid his stealthy hand upon it; but, as he did so, a deep hoarse malediction escaped in a kind of whisper, and shrinking back he stole softly away with all speed, and quitted the balcony—for he had seen a tableau that baffled his vengeance, and no doubt saved his soul from the perpetration of a terrible crime!

A little delay might have changed the fate of more than one person connected with our story; a great tragedy might have

taken place almost without discovery, for had aught occurred to Cecil, it might have been attributed to his wounded and weak condition—so near was the prediction of Palenka being verified, not on the field of battle or in the carnage of charging squadrons, but in the quietude and seclusion of a fashionable hotel!

From the latter, the amiable Hew took his departure on the instant, and it is very unlikely that he will ever cross the path of Cecil again.

Dreams are usually independent of all details and coherency; but Cecil, as he dozed on, seemed to become gradually aware of the dear and familiar face, of one who smiled gently upon him, as she bent over him—her very life—her treasure, and delicious was the thrill the dream gave him.

The sense of a beloved presence became more vivid and defined. He heard his name called, and started to find Mary stooping over him, her veil thrown back, and her eyes—soft and loving at all times—softer now with an infinite yearning, as

she saw how weak he was, and how hard had been the struggle between youth and Death!

'Mary, Mary, let me hear your voice again!' he said, as he folded her in his arms, yet with that expression of doubt in his haggard eye, as of one who feared the joy around him might be a dream and pass away.

'Take her to your heart, my boy—the same blood runs in your veins!' said old Sir Piers, all unused to act 'the heavy parent,' but his keen bright eyes were as humid and moist as an old man's can well be, as he took Cecil's face between his withered hands, and gazed into his features as if he thought he could never look at them sufficiently; 'my own boy's eyes!' he exclaimed, with a kind of sob in his throat; 'my own boy's brow and lips—my poor Piers—you are his son—his son!'

A soft kiss was now laid upon his cheek—the kiss of Annabelle Erroll, and then the latter retired into the recess of a window, with her tall, dark lover Fothering-

hame, who had no doubt a vast deal to tell her, and seemed to do so, very quietly and very softly, under the shadow of the curtains.

'My darling, my darling!' Cecil could but whisper again and again.

'Oh, Cecil—Cecil, whom I thought I was never—never to see again! How have I ever lived through all this!' she kept repeating; 'why did you go to Servia?'

'What mattered it where I went *then* —at the time, I mean!'

He gave a short sigh, as even her beloved cheek on his wounded chest made him wince.

'Egad, what a home-coming we'll have!' said the general; 'Rungeet entering Lahore will be nothing to it! Old John Balderstone, and Mrs. Garth, widow of Garth of Ours—you remember her, Cecil? will be mustering the tenants and everybody—old Tunley too—what a Christmas we'll have! And there will be a bonfire on the old tower-head at Eaglescraig, that will light up the whole Firth of Clyde!'

But the lovers thought only of the future, which seemed so close and certain now.

Pillowed on Mary's breast—surrounded by friends and all the perfect safety of home and assured position, there was—to Cecil—a calm and delicious joy in existence now, after all the fierce whirl, the aching disappointment, and the wild excitement of his life recently.

THE END.

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